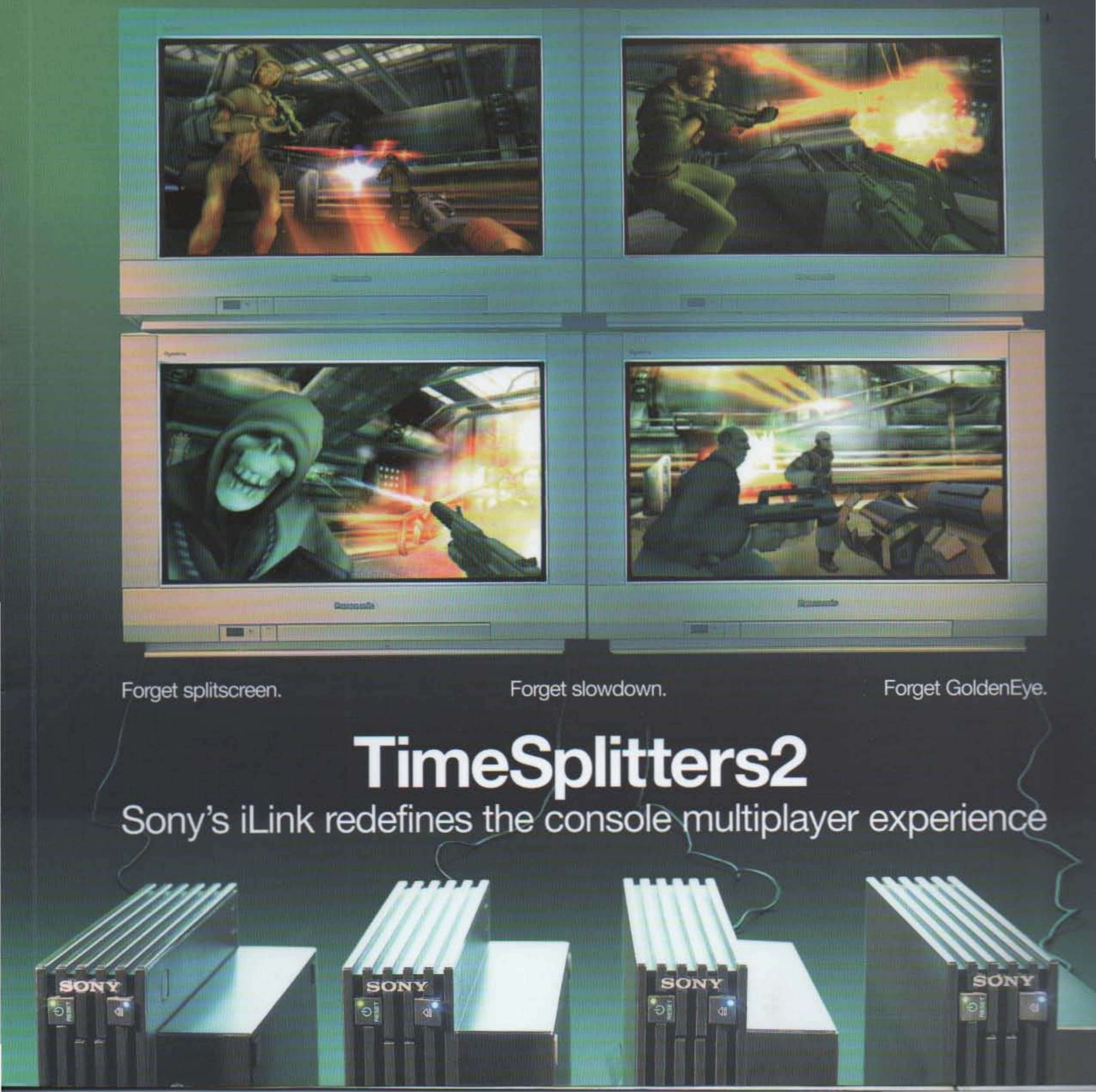
The future of electronic entertainment issue#102

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Forget splitscreen. Forget slowdown. Forget GoldenEye.

TimeSplitters2

Sony's iLink redefines the console multiplayer experience





A quick glance at the rain-soaked tourists beyond the confines of the **Edge** office suggests that summer has come to its typically abrupt end. And with it, **Edge** hopes, the end of a videogame drought as long and as painful as any on record.

The videogame market, we're constantly reminded, is cyclical. Boom and bust. For every bounteous SNES/Mega Drive Christmas it enjoys, the market has to pay by suffering a 3DO/Jaguar summer. Likewise, the last PlayStation-fuelled 'boom' eventually made way for a not-quite-next-generation 'bust', when the combined efforts of PSone and N64 and Dreamcast couldn't quite compete with the longing for – and lack of – PlayStation2.

Ironically, the 2000-2001 'gap' year (so-called because of the generational gap between consoles) was a good one for retail, thanks to the likes of *Pokémon*, *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* and a feeding-frenzy of budget re-releases. But for all those companies who had bet the farm on PS2 picking up exactly where PSone left off, it's been a tough time.

Protracted production schedules and a languid PS2 market has seen a number of publishers de-centralise and down-size. New-born projects have been prematurely canned and staff have been laid off. And from a developer's perspective, when you combine the 'bust' status with the market's seasonal nadir, the past few months have been no time to try and launch anything but mass-market crowd-pleasers. Indeed, while Japanese publishers seemingly carry on regardless, the UK has been hit in terms of quality *and* quantity. Games of any real impact have been few and far between.

But, slowly, the market is gaining pace. There's an almost tangible feeling of acceleration, as the milestones come thick and fast: Spaceworld, ECTS, GameCube launch Japan, Xbox launch US… it is, at last, starting to happen. **Edge**'s Kogepan forward planner is gradually filling and both the PreScreen and TestScreen sections grow ever fatter.

Truly, it is a good time to be a videogamer. After all, the anticipation of an event is often just as good as the event itself, and we have so much to look forward to. So, as the nights draw in and the central heating roars lustily back into life, perhaps it's a good thing that we Brits now have a valid excuse to stay indoors…





Features







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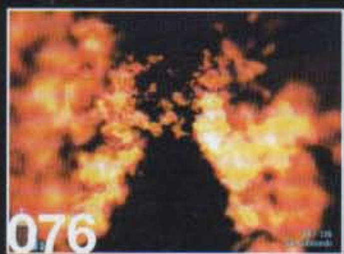












Prescreen







Regulars

Testscreen

Colour reproduction
Pre-Press, Bath Phoenix Repro, Bath

Print
Cradley Print, Warley, West Midlands

Production of Edge
Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4, iMac
Software: QuarkXPress, Adobe *Photoshop*, Macromedia *FreeHand*, and Nisus Writer **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica [illegible], Thin, Light, Roman, Medium, **Bold**

"You see, in this world there's two kinds of people, my friend: Those with loaded guns and those who dig. You dig"

frontend

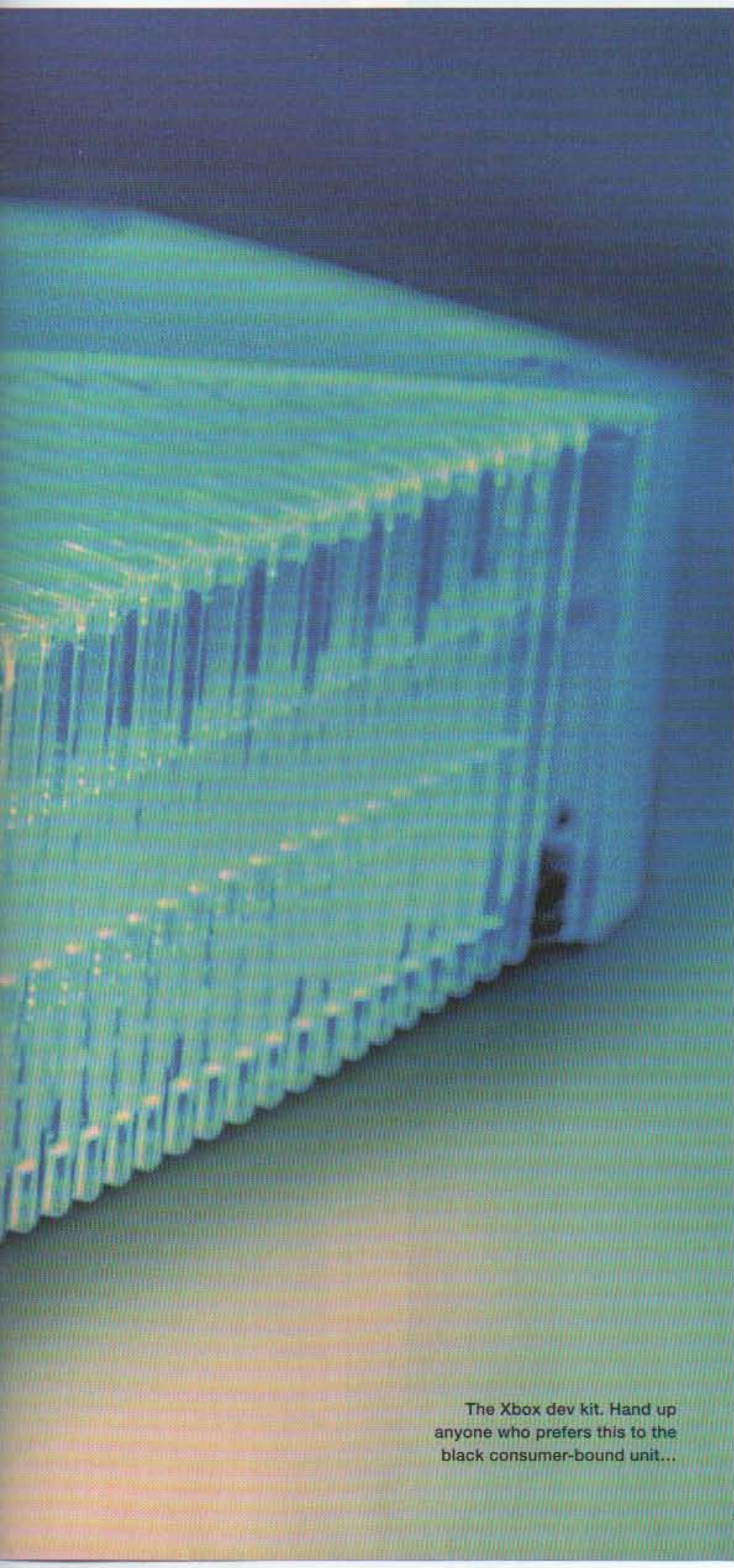
News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Photography: Martin Thompson

Testing times for Microsoft

The rumour mill is in full swing as production line problems are denied. But is the first round of the battle with Sony already over for Redmond's big black box before it's even officially begun?



The Xbox dev kit. Hand up anyone who prefers this to the black consumer-bound unit…

There are less than two months to go before Microsoft enters the consumer electronics market with the launch of Xbox, and the pressure is building. The latest gossip to hit the newswires concerned a report that a fault had been discovered in Xbox's Intel motherboard, potentially halting production for up to four weeks.

Within hours of the report, released by US brokers Thomas Weisel Partners, Microsoft issued an angry rebuttal. "We're not commenting on specific Xbox videogame system manufacturing efforts," it stated, "but we can say that there is absolutely no problem with the design of Intel's motherboard. Intel has been a fantastic partner and has delivered on everything for Xbox to date. We're still marching toward our planned November 8 launch date for Xbox."

Irrespective of the truth of such news, it's clear that as the launch gets closer, Microsoft will be the target of an increasing amount of public scrutiny. Considering the negative comments that bedevilled relatively small glitches in both Sega and Sony's hardware launches, the attitude towards Microsoft is only likely to become more antagonistic.

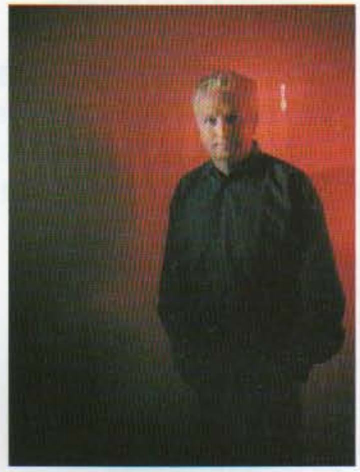
The E3 backlash

The trigger for much of this sentiment was Microsoft's perceived lacklustre showing at E3. Since then, there have been plenty of rumours of publisher unease and moves to cut back on the number of Xbox games that will be released. Significantly, US market research firm DFC Intelligence has changed its view on the leader of what it calls the next-generation console race. In its 2000 report, it was hesitant to predict a clear winner; now, it places PlayStation2 as the market leader.

"I think the entrance of Microsoft created such anticipation that as reality dawned, it was viewed as something of an anticlimax in certain quarters," says **Rod Cousens**, president and COO of Acclaim International. "I also think that the emphasis shifted at E3 because the impact of Nintendo had been underestimated within the industry. The path that was beaten to Microsoft's door, as some developers and publishers shifted allegiance, became less well trodden."

This underlines the biggest test Microsoft has to face. It finds itself in a





Despite a reasonable showing at E3, sentiment seems to have turned against Microsoft. Acclaim's Rod Cousens has no plans to provide exclusive Xbox content

Xbox at TGS

Despite not showing up at this year's ECTS, Microsoft will be the most prominent exhibitor at the Tokyo Game Show. This reflects the formidable task that faces the company in convincing sceptical Japanese gamers that the Xbox will be a superior gaming platform than either PlayStation2 or GameCube. The company will also be holding an advance preview of its forthcoming hardware and software at the start of October, at an as yet unspecified location. Meanwhile, the Xbox marketing push has begun in earnest, with in-store promotional materials arriving in US retail outlets in advance of the machine's November launch.







One of the key questions facing Microsoft is whether it has enough exclusive titles. Are *Project Gotham*, *Amped* and *Dead Or Alive 3* exclusive enough?

chicken and egg situation: in order to convince publishers that Xbox will be a lucrative platform, it needs to gain a large installed base, but to secure that installed base, it needs a couple of killer apps that, by definition, are exclusive to the format.

Acclaim was one of the few publishers to make a success of singleformat publishing, notably for the N64, so Cousens understands the issues better than most. "The return on investment in creating a brand is such that it can be maximised across multiformats and multi-exploitations. In order to achieve this in isolation, there has to be inducement from the platform holder or the ability to take significant market share on a smaller hardware base. If this cannot be realised, then exclusive content on a trailing system is probably not viable." At present, Acclaim has no plans to release any exclusive Xbox titles.

"I think Microsoft is learning what sort of exclusive titles it should have. I will be very surprised if the muted response to *Dead Or Alive 3* hasn't been significant for it," echoes one anonymous Xbox developer. "They are still learning what it means to be in the console mindset."

"Microsoft's first full year for global distribution will be in 2002 and the lead that Sony is likely to have at the end of that year, in terms of installed base, is probably unassailable"

And the brutal fact is that Microsoft has much to learn. While it intellectually acknowledges that software sells hardware – it has poached experienced thirdparty staff from Nintendo, Sony and Sega – there's a feeling that it doesn't inherently understand what this entails. After all, Microsoft is a company that has spent 20 years telling the world it needs a PC on every desk. That level of embedded culture can't be turned around in a couple of years.

Xbox consolation

James Ashton-Tyler, editor-in-chief of the *Official Xbox Magazine*, who has also edited a number of PC and console magazines, thinks Microsoft is heading in the right direction, though. "Having been involved with Xbox since September last year, I'm convinced that no company understands the differences between the PC and console markets better than Microsoft. If you ask developers what Microsoft's major concerns are during the development process, they'll talk about a company that is almost obsessed by creating a console game experience."

But significantly, perhaps the real problem for Microsoft is the timeframe in which it is operating. In hindsight there aren't many things it could have done differently. A cheap jibe would be to say it should rehearse its presentations more thoroughly, but on the key question of acquiring the killer apps it desperately needs, there's little room for manoeuvre. Only a handful of developers are capable of creating them, but as most have built up their multimillion-selling franchises on PlayStation, they're unlikely to suddenly switch to Xbox exclusives. And despite Microsoft's deep pockets, there are few world-class console studios available, anyway. Crown jewels such as Rare, Core Design, Reflections, Neversoft and Naughty Dog are unattainable. In this context, the $5m Microsoft 'lent' Interplay to ensure the exclusively of Shiny's 'The Matrix' game looks like money well spent.

"I was really shocked when Microsoft didn't buy Sega," comments one source, who has worked with both companies. "I do think they need to get more Japanese people and exclusive Japanese titles on board, because they will learn more from that than anything else. They're not going to learn anything from American developers."

"Microsoft's traditional business model is to completely be on top of everything," ventures another industry observer. "It is hands-on in the creative process. I think it feels it's easier to do that with smaller independent companies than if it tried to get what it wanted out of EA, for example."

One bizarre move, however, was to let Argonaut's *Malice*, which Bill Gates has praised as an exclusive Xbox title demonstrating the console's capabilities, slip through its fingers – Vivendi Universal will also be releasing it for PlayStation2. And while issues other than money were obviously involved, *Malice* is exactly the kind of title Microsoft can't afford to lose.

From a publisher's perceptive, Rod Cousens fears that the Microsoft may already find itself in third place. "Microsoft's first full year for global distribution will be in 2002 and the lead that Sony is likely to have at the end of that year, in terms of installed base, is probably unassailable, being a factor of four- or five-fold over its nearest competitor," he says. Within Europe, Sony predicts PlayStation2's install base will be well over 5m prior to Xbox's 2002 launch.

Perhaps the most important question Microsoft will have to ask itself is how determined is it to succeed in the console games market. While it can afford to lose money, figureheads such as Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer will come under strong shareholder pressure if Microsoft is stuck in third place behind Sony and Nintendo, haemorrhaging cash for a number of years. Yet in areas it considers strategically important to the company, Microsoft has proved it's prepared to lose a lot of money in order to influence the industry and finally overwhelm the competition, as the likes of Palm, Handspring and Psion are presently discovering in the PDA market. The persuasive powers of Robbie Bach and Seamus Blackley may be fully stretched over the coming years.





As with many 'exclusive' Xbox titles, it's a little bit disingenuous to overstate the uniqueness of *Jet Set Radio Future*, though *Oddworld* won't appear anywhere else

Microsoft responds: Seamus Blackley

Microsoft's Xbox evangelist was keen to dispel negative rumours

How concerned are you that market consultants now expect PlayStation2 to be the highest selling system of the current round of consoles?

Analysts are smart, but they have to operate on secondary knowledge, opinions, impressions, and guesses. They interview people, read articles, and try to guess what intentions and assets Microsoft and our competitors are going to apply. But they don't actually know what's happening inside any of these companies, or in the heads of the consumers. More often that not, their guesses are wildly incorrect. You should always be a bit suspicious of conclusions and predictions based on this kind of stuff.

Microsoft is well known for continuing to innovate its products within markets it sees to be strategically important for the longterm despite short to medium term reversals. How does this strategy map onto the game console market?

You could have said the same thing about Sony, when they entered with PSone, or Nintendo, the playing card company, when they started doing electronic games. We can't all run around and talk about how we're bigger than film, how it's becoming the driving force of entertainment, then decide that it's not a 'real business' that a company like Microsoft would take seriously. Remember that Microsoft has been investing in games in one form or another since the early eighties. That aside, the thing that Microsoft is really known for is making shrewd business decisions. The Xbox business is no exception – it's a business, it has to make money. Now, we all know that in the console world you don't know if you're successful for quite some time after you launch because of the huge investment required these days. Look at Sony's latest financial report – launching a console is painful, and it's a business you *have* to be in for the long haul. Everyone understands this – Microsoft, Sony, Nintendo, and Sega. There is a lot of thinking and cold hard reality checking at every stage of Xbox – it never would have gotten off the ground without it.

Would you be happy to lose money through the lifetime of Xbox 1, if it sets Microsoft up to be the market leader with Xbox 2?
Xbox is a business – it will make money.

Have you been disappointed about the press response to Xbox, which has become increasingly negative since E3?
In the consumer press, the coverage is overwhelmingly positive, but in the hardcore games mags, it's en vogue to print that Xbox is in trouble these days. It's strange to me because it's not really based on any facts, and because most of the stories are bizarrely inaccurate. Today I sat in my office with a very prominent US journalist, a known malcontent who very seldomly gives praise, playing *DOA3* on final hardware. His comment, after having his ass kicked for about an hour-and-a-half straight by your intrepid interviewee, was "This is possibly the finest, most beautiful fighting game in history." Tonight I got home, and read in a magazine that Xbox has no killer launch titles and that the final hardware is delayed for months. Go figure, as we say in the US.

At the recent GDC, you spoke a lot about Japan. Do you feel you are still on course there in terms of consumer reaction and developer support?
Absolutely. In fact, Japanese developers have been scaring me a bit lately – when they get into a piece of hardware they really go for it. We will be seeing some *shockingly* cool stuff from Japan on an ongoing basis. There is one title in particular that I really did not believe was not a movie, which is rare for the type of cynical bastard I am proud to be. As for consumers, remember that, just like with the launch of any product, it's dangerous to speculate on consumer reaction before any advertising has been done and before the product is actually available. So far in Japan, and for that matter in the US and Europe as well, our surveys of actual consumers are looking surprisingly good. Its actually somewhat startling to us that with zero investment (as of yet) in consumer marketing Xbox gets enormous positive brand recognition worldwide.

industryopinion

Edge asks the industry for its first impressions of XBox

We think that the Xbox has tremendous potential still. It's easy to forget that E3 was one of the first major public showings of the Xbox. Compared to other first showings of comparable game consoles in the past, Microsoft had a good number of very reasonable launch titles being shown. As a company, Microsoft has significant resources that they have indicated will be committed to the Xbox launch, and they don't seem to enter new markets with an intent to lose – so we think that they will (at the very least) pose a considerable challenge to the incumbents in the videogame wars. The best thing that Microsoft can do to combat rumours about the Xbox is to sign up (and announce that they are doing so) additional talented developers with solid titles, and work hard to ensure that the launch period goes as smoothly as possible for retailers and their publishing partners. As a developer, we're quite excited to see where the Xbox goes.
Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk joint CEOs of BioWare

We haven't had any trouble with dev kits, and nor has anyone else I know. Even developers who don't have them (maybe because they don't have approval?) can write for a high-end PC to start with, and moving over to the Xbox shouldn't be too much trouble from there – as far as I can tell all that happens is everything runs a lot faster when you switch over. The spec changes are insignificant compared to writing for the PC where you've got all these different hardware configurations to deal with – I don't think that anyone is going to get upset about them. It's much more important that the machine goes out at the right price. The success of a console depends as much on the marketing and price as it does on the quality of the games. As far as content goes, they've got *Metal Gear*, they've got our game and no doubt anything that's on both the Xbox and PS2 will be better on the Xbox. The development community are behind the machine as it's so easy to write for, and this will come through in the games. I don't think there's anything on the PS2 yet for Microsoft to be jealous of, except maybe *Gran Turismo 3*, and anyone who wants that badly enough will have bought a PS2 already. The only territory that they're likely to suffer in is Japan, where the size of the hardware and controller may be a problem. Certainly in America and Europe I think it will do very well, and all the rumours will be dispelled at launch.
Anonymous Xbox developer

Cosmetic concerns aside, Xbox is a great machine. And it's a far easier platform to get excited about than PlayStation2, because Xbox is the outsider, the unknown. In emotional terms, however, Sony isn't Microsoft's problem. Xbox will launch on time – it has too – but that means launching in the States against GameCube. So we're talking about winning gamers' hearts, and it's hard to imagine a worse company to engage in that battle with than Nintendo. There's a simple, brutal solution to the (inevitable) rumour and speculation: Microsoft needs to start spending big money on securing exclusives that gamers will care about. *Halo* was a mistake; *Abe* seems a dubious investment; *DOA3* is a start. But we need to see titles like *Doom III* being snapped up and shoved in people's faces. The Xbox people claim to be about games, games and more games; the unavoidable cliche is that it's time they put their money where their mouths are.
Anonymous Xbox developer

Microsoft is like Islam – it is unwise to criticise either in print.
Anonymous developer

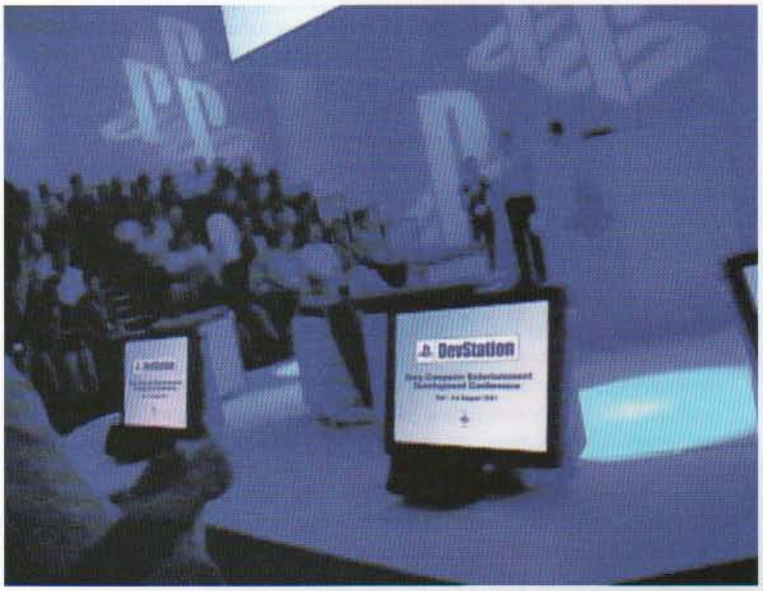
Over the last year, Microsoft has gone through an extremely visible learning process in which inconsistencies and weaknesses have been particularly highlighted. Microsoft has certainly suffered increased negative sentiment of late as a result. However, as Nintendo proved with N64 (which was slated by the industry for its use of cartridge, limited software range etc.) the existence of such a sentiment does not preclude commercial success. Microsoft needs to confound its critics by not only releasing some high-quality titles but by releasing a consistent flow of high-quality titles. It has gone some way to securing premium content on an exclusive (*Halo*, *Shrek*, *Oddworld*) or limited-time exclusive basis (*DOA3*, *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Dino Crisis 3*) and will no doubt be adding to these in future. However, it is still unclear whether Microsoft has a single killer title that can make the Xbox attractive to the massmarket as Mario, Sonic, *Tomb Raider* and *GT* have done in the past.
Nick Gibson Games Analyst, Durlacher

Usually, rumours are better left for what they are, but it can't be denied that the general buzz surrounding Xbox after E3 has been slightly negative. As always, however, it doesn't really matter whether the rumours are true or not or whether the negative press is justified or not. The simple fact is that these things exist, and that the Xbox may suffer from them. Sega have shown what lack of credibility from retailers, publishers and consumers alike can do to a perfectly fine machine with perfectly fine software. Some surprise announcements at TGS wouldn't harm the Seattle giant, therefore, in order to silence the critics. Still, Microsoft always seems to be at its best when criticised most, and it's highly unlikely that the launch is going to be a failure (demand always outstrips supply, and any console hardware launch these days is a 'success'). For the Xbox, the first 14 months after the launch are going to be crucial. Two questions currently remain unanswered: what will come after *Halo*, *Abe* and *Project Gotham*, and will the marketing divisions be able to generate an aura of success and street credibility surrounding the machine?
Martin de Ronde Lost Boys Games

There is a lot of negative rumour surrounding the Xbox launch right now, but then the same can be said of every major platform launch of the past few years to one degree or another. As to whether these rumours are well founded or not, I'd rather not speculate. What I do know, though, is that Microsoft has very good people, the right attitude and certainly the money to have a good shot to at least bring Xbox to a level with its competitors. As with all things in this industry it really comes down to the games; sure, Microsoft do not seem to have a 'killer app' at the moment, but the hardware is impressive, and developer support is there so it should just be a matter of time. But then time is sometimes a luxury that can be ill-afforded.
Demis Hassabis Elixir Studios

Sony pulls out the stops for DevStation

Online strategy revealed and winning status underlined as SCEE holds its annual European development conference



Sony emphasised its commitment to thirdparty developers with an extravagantly organised version of its annual DevStation conference. Held in a style the programmers and artists were unlikely to be accustomed to from previous developer bashes, Sony dug deep into its pockets and created a branded PS2 environment within the upmarket Hilton Metropole hotel in Brighton.

Swirling lights, dozens of PlayStation2 demo units, an extensive middleware area, specially printed menus and the odd burst of block-rocking beats between speakers, all underlined the importance with which it treats the battle for developers' hearts and minds.

Gloss aside, the 250-odd delegates from 80 European studios were provided with useful information too, as Sony unveiled some of the strategic roadmap of its online strategy. There were also technical presentations on getting the most out of PlayStation2 hardware.

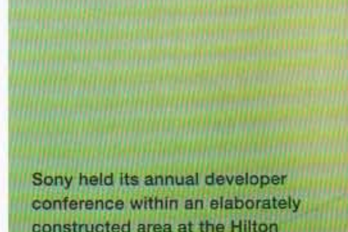
Slow start acknowledged

Chris Deering, president of SCEE, provided the opening address. After admitting a slow start to PlayStation2 due to production issues, he affirmed Sony's reliance on growing the industry as a whole. "The total number of PSones and PlayStation2s is now past the 100m mark and it won't be long until we have sold 1bn discs," he boasted. "That means a lot of opportunities for the games industry." He also said that he expects the current European PlayStation2 install base to jump from 2m units to more than 5m by the end of 2001.

"The total number of PSones and PlayStation2s is now past the 100m mark and it won't be long until we have sold 1bn discs. That means a lot of opportunities for the games industry"

Deering continued by confirming the value of the online market to Sony, using figures which predict that by 2005 there will be the same number of TV-based Internet users as PC-based users. "The TV Internet experience through PlayStation2 will be very different to the


Around 250 developers from 80 European studios attended DevStation to hear the lowdown on Sony's plans


Sony held its annual developer conference within an elaborately constructed area at the Hilton

DevStation

PC Internet," he explained. "Although portals will exist, users will be unencumbered by them. It will be possible to access thirdparty servers directly, with no visible interruption." This suggests Sony will not be positioning PlayStation2 as a living room gateway to the Internet in the same way that Sega marketed Dreamcast. Gaming and game-related activities will be key, not general browsing.

Modem and hard disk for PS2

Further details were provided by SCEE director of technology, **Paul Holman**. He confirmed that a combined narrowband and broadband modem will ship in Europe, although the price has yet to be fixed. The schedule for PlayStation2's hard disk also remains to be finalised, but it's unlikely to be available until 2002. "We haven't set a price or a size yet," said Holman. "It will be a minimum of 40Gb, but we want to make it as big as possible to ensure it's useful for games and services."

The biggest issue, however, is how Sony will persuade users to get online in the first place. "We want to build the install base but what I must stress is the adoption may not be driven by games per se," Holman added cryptically. Sony's trial with TeleWest is crucial in this respect. "Based on the Ethernet connection and hard disk drive, all users will need is a drop cable to connect their PlayStation2 network adapter to their set-top box," explained Holman. "We are looking at providing online games and community building content of some form."



SCEE president, Chris Deering told developers that Sony expects the TV-based Internet to be the next online revolution, and PlayStation2 will be at its forefront







Nintendo online details emerge

According to Japanese newspaper, *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*, Nintendo has outlined plans to release network modems for the forthcoming GameCube early next year. The first networked title available for the platform is still expected to be Sonic Team's *Phantasy Star Online*, and there are two types of modem, a narrowband 56K version and a broadband adapter. Sonic Team will also be unveiling *Puyo Puyo* and *Sonic Advance* at Spaceworld, with an as yet unnamed fourth title also in the works for the GameCube. Indeed GameCube will also receive a fillip from the news that the sequel to Dreamcast classic *Soul Calibur* is also set to grace the platform – adding to expectations that Nintendo's next generation won't just be for kids. Expect further details in **Edge**'s report from Spaceworld, next issue.

SIGGRAPH

Among the various exhibitors at this year's Siggraph exhibition, which took place at the end of August in Los Angeles, were Softimage, which was offering free training for its *XSI 1.5* toolset, and RealViz, which announced version 3.0 of its *ImageModeler* application. Aimed at cutting-edge animators and digital artists, techniques and applications unveiled at Siggraph have historically made their way into the field of videogame technology when it catches up. Perhaps the most impressive demonstration of this was Square's 'Final Fantasy' movie, running on an NVidia card in realtime. Next issue of **Edge** will contain a full report.

Emma foundation

The closing date for the 2001 International EMMAs (Electronic Multimedia Awards) is September 28. Rewarding originality in the area of digital media content creation, the awards will be announced simultaneously in the UK, USA, Canada and mainland Europe during early November. This year sees the introduction of a special student category, offering a cash prize to the winner and their college or institution. Full details on how to enter, including categories, terms and conditions and secure online entry facilities can be found at http://t2.innovyx.com/redir.asp?159_1_293, or alternatively, would-be entrants can contact Tom Hall (EMMA Foundation, Tel: +44 1457 870855, e-mail: Tom@emma-foundation.org)

All change at ECTS 2001

UK trade show joins forces with GDC and sees registrations rise, despite competing events and the absence of major console manufacturers

The absence of any major console manufacturer and the non-attendance of several key publishers doesn't seem to have tarnished the reputation of this year's ECTS, which sees a 14 per cent increase in the number of pre-show registrations compared to last year. Event organisers hope to build on the success of last year's show, which featured 22,000 exhibitors from more than 64 countries, by switching venue from London's Olympia to the purpose built ExCeL exhibition centre.

For the first time, this year sees the exhibition prefaced by the GDCE, the European offshoot of the annual GDC conference, now in its 15th year. The two events will run concurrently, with GDCE taking place on August 31 and September 1, and ECTS running from September 2-4. Also for the first time, the annual ECTS awards ceremony will feature the **Edge** Award for Excellence in Development.

The number of companies variously pulling out of, cashing in on, or simply not attending ECTS is indicative of a growing trend suggesting that larger publishers, and particularly console manufacturers, no longer feel obliged to tailor their marketing campaigns to a prescribed videogame calendar – a trend that has undermined the Tokyo Game Show in recent years. But it's clear that a number of non-attendees will be taking advantage of the assembled convocation by holding their own events. Nintendo will be running its own showcase event over the weekend of ECTS, and while open to invited guests only on Saturday, in a particularly brazen move ECTS badge holders will be able to attend over the next two days. Likewise, Sony will be holding a small press reception independently of the show on Monday September 3, and will be organising a party as it has done in previous years. Microsoft, meanwhile, will be holding its own Xbox event later in the year.

ects
2-4 September 2001
ExCeL London

For the first time, this year sees the exhibition prefaced by the GDCE, the European offshoot of the annual Game Developers Conference, now in its 15th year



Even without the attendance of several – some might argue *all* – of the key industry players, pre-show registration for ECTS has increased by some 14 per cent over last year

And it's not just console manufacturers. Activision has already showcased its titles to press and retail at the annual Activate event, while Eidos will also be holding an independent event for retailers. Electronic Arts and Capcom will be demonstrating their wares on the Sunday of ECTS at the EA Play event. The fact that most or all of these events coincide with the timing of ECTS suggests that event organisers may have to look at what they can do to woo these potential exhibitors back for next year's event. Perhaps introducing a day for trade visitors only, as with the Tokyo Game Show, might create a climate more appropriate for the needs of these publishers.

Publishers commit to show

In any case, there will still be a healthy number of big name publishers at ExCeL. Codemasters, Ubi Soft, Rage, nVidia, Konami, Midway and Intel are among the list of over 220 confirmed exhibitors, and there are a number of announcements that are already scheduled as **Edge** goes to press. Guillemot and Logitech have both announced press conferences, for example, but more intriguing is the fact that Blizzard has set up two back-to-back conferences on the Sunday. No doubt these will all be joined by the usual quota of zany thirdparty/coin-op manufacturers from obscure parts of the world.

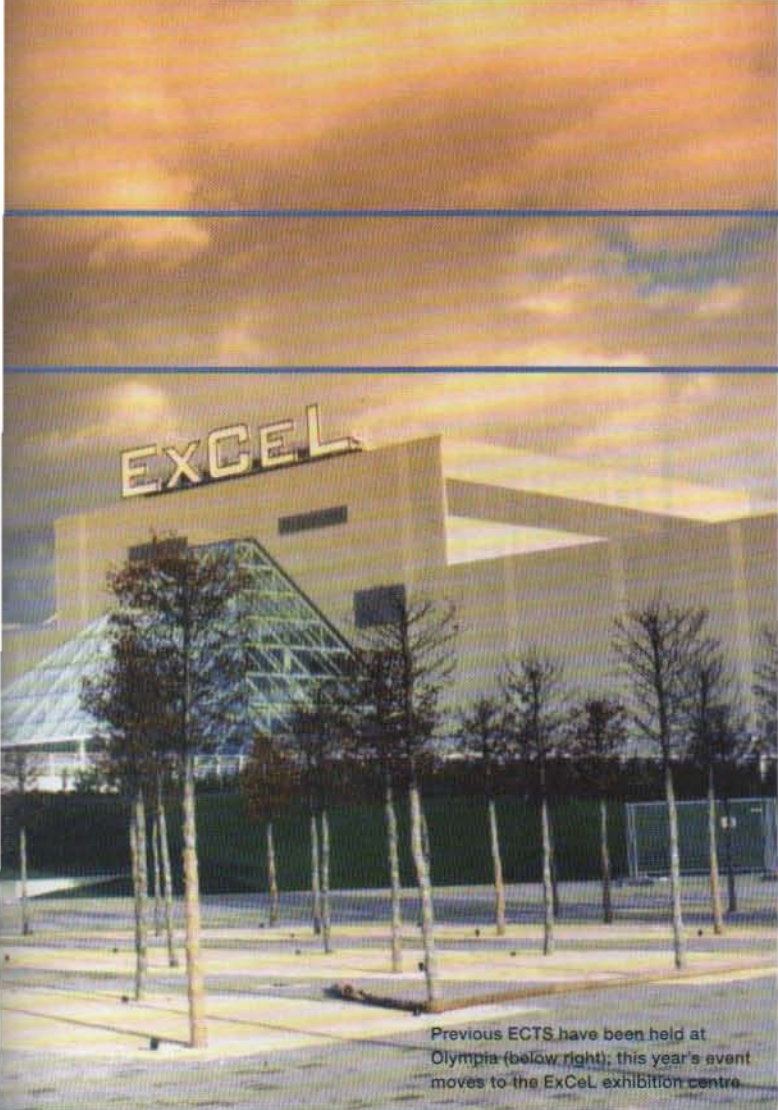


And, of course, ECTS isn't just about the exhibitors. To alleviate the lack of surrounding watering holes, at which, it should be noted, a healthy amount of business usually gets done, the exhibition itself will have a bar in the centre of the show floor, as well as an official bar, Dicken's Inn, and hotel, the Tower Thistle, both situated at St. Katharine's Dock.

There will also be the small matter of the Awards ceremony. Once again this will be presented by the 'Bits' girls, Emily Newton-Dunn, Emily Booth, and Aleks Krotoski, on the Monday. Joining the People's Award, voted fo by visitors to www.ects.com, and the Awards of the Show, judged by a panel of journalists, this year sees the addition of three developer awards to the roster. The **Edge** Award for Excellence in Development will be announced alongside the *Develop* Magazine Award for British Game Design Innovation, and the *PC Gamer* Award for Best PC Developer.

Also of interest to the development

ects

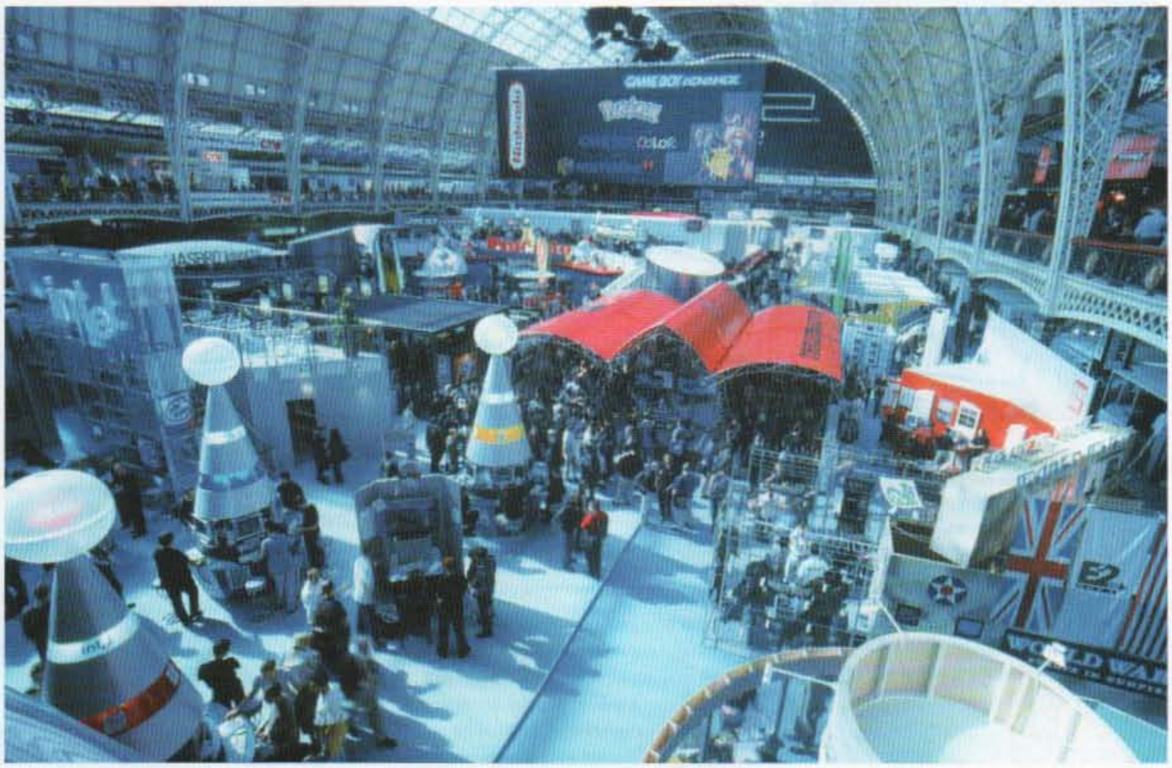


Previous ECTS have been held at Olympia (below right); this year's event moves to the ExCeL exhibition centre



community will be GDCE, which boasts a hugely impressive and varied schedule of seminars, roundtable discussions, and lectures devoted to issues affecting developers. Two keynote speeches will be delivered, one by Sony's Phil Harrison, and the other by *PaRappa* creator, Masaya Matsuura. Harrison's lecture, 'The Definition of Next Generation' may strike some anti-Sony **Edge** readers as ironic, particularly as it intends to use SCEE titles as case studies, but Matsuura-san's discussion of videogaming as a global cultural phenomenon promises to be fascinating.

Harrison and Matsuura-san aside, the range of speakers encompasses all facets of videogame development. Kuju's Ian Baverstock, Microsoft's Seamus Blackley, Kevin Bachus (ex of Microsoft), Glenn Corpes, Demis Hassabis and Peter Molyneux are joined by law firm Osborne Clarke's Pam Dalton, M&A boutique Livingstone Guarantee's Jeremy Furniss and the ICDC's Matthew Southern. As you'd expect, the range of topics for discussion is similarly wide, ranging from the history of videogames, through management of IP, to designing levels for *The Getaway* and the role of narrative in videogames, and so there should be something for all aspects of the development community.



GameZone for digital content show

Digital Media World becomes the latest digital media content exhibition to dedicate a significant part of its line-up to the increasingly popular world of videogaming







Speakers at the two day programme that's being held as part of Digital Media World include (from top) independent consultant, Ernest Adams, Digital Bridges CEO, Kevin Bradshaw, and International Hobo's Chris Bateman. The thorny question of narrative in gaming features prominently on the agenda for the first day, while the second day is wholly devoted to the wireless gaming sector

Now in its eighth year, Digital Media World is an exhibition devoted to digital content creation and the distribution of film, video and interactive entertainment. Taking place on November 13-15 in London at Olympia 2, this year sees the launch of a dedicated GameZone as part of the event, consisting of a two-day programme of lectures and seminars, which will be introduced by **Edge** editor Steve Jarratt.

The GameZone itself takes place on November 13 and 14. The first day opens up with talks by Frontier Development's David Braben, Lionhead's Peter Molyneux and Ernest Adams, an independent consultant. The morning's topics range from the impact of future technologies on game design to interactivity versus storytelling, and *Project Ego* will be used as a case study in moving from PC to next-generation consoles - maintaining the depth of play associated with PC titles but introducing a level of accessibility more appropriate to a solid-state machine. These talks are followed by a panel discussion focusing on independent developers with the likes of Jason Kingsley from Rebellion and Fred Hasson, the chairman of TIGA. After a break for lunch, Nick Percival from Coolbeans will discuss 3D character creation, followed by Gavin Moore who will be detailing the facial animation process on Team Soho's *The Getaway*. Next up is Charles Cecil followed by Chris Bateman, discussing narrative driven games and interactive storytelling, respectively. The highlight of the day, though, is likely to be Ion Storm's Warren Spector, who will be delivering a talk entitled 'Keeping it simple: engaging the user with dynamic storytelling, easy accessibility and simple controls'.

13-15 November 2001
Olympia 2. London UK

Although the general event has been running for eight years, this year sees the inclusion of the first dedicated GameZone

"The highlight of the day, though, is likely to be Ion Storm's Warren Spector, who will be delivering a talk entitled 'Keeping it simple: engaging the user with dynamic storytelling'"

Mobile and online gaming

The second day of the programme is geared towards examining the burgeoning mobile sector. A line up of speakers includes Datamonitor's Peter Tyson, who will be discussing the market for online gaming, Lasse Seppanen from Grip Studios, who will be talking about wireless game design, and nGame's John Brimacombe, talking about cross-platform game design. After a panel discussion devoted to the subject, TIGA's wireless gaming arm will be holding its own mobile games seminar.

Aside from the GameZone, Digital Media World will also feature Digital Training, Recruitment, Media Asset Management and Streaming Media villages. Although unlikely to appeal to **Edge** readers, the last two offer the opportunity to speak to the training specialists for the digital content creation market, and the chance to submit CVs to the leading animation houses.

ATI graphics cards

ATI has introduced its next-generation Radeon graphics chip and board technologies. The radeon series builds on the company's first generation of products. The Radeon 8500 includes Truform and SmartShader technologies to enhance texture and lighting procedures, while a slightly less enhanced Radeon 7500 is intended for a more mainstream price point.

"With the Truform and SmartShader components of the Radeon 8500 graphics chip, combined with the DirectX 8.1 environment that will first be available in the Windows XP operating system, game developers can produce more visually innovative and complex 3D computer graphics including higher order surfaces without hindering performance," said **Channing Verbeck**, director of Windows graphics and gaming technologies at Microsoft Corp.

Computer Arts Live

Future Publishing's magazine for digital artists hosts another annual exhibition showcasing the latest cutting-edge creative software

Readers with aspirations to break into the videogame industry as either an animator or digital artist could do worse than attend this year's *Computer Arts* LIVE show, which will be held on October 10-12 at the Business Design Centre in Islington, North London. Organised by Future Publishing's *Computer Arts* magazine, the event will be bigger and broader in scope than last year's, which was attended by some 6,000 people, and has been expanded to fill the main hall at the BDC.

Open from 9.30am to 5.30pm, the event's exhibition floor will be full of hardware, software, publishing, design and recruitment companies from the creative industry touting their wares and taking showgoers through the latest cutting-edge creative techniques, so it's an excellent place for industry wannabes to start building a portfolio of contacts. Along with the keynote speech, which will be given by Mike Hopwood, Adobe's senior director of product management, there will be a host of speakers discussing techniques and products. Companies such as Designers Republic, Aardman Animations Limited, hillmancurtis, The Mill and Digit will also be taking questions on the *Computer Arts* stage. Of particular interest to **Edge** readers will be the talk given by William Latham of Computer Artworks, and a panel discussion on the finer points of 3D design.

Also of interest is the presence of several influential animation toolset developers, particularly Alias|Wavefront, which is one of the exhibition sponsors, and Softimage, which will be demonstrating its *XSI 2.0* toolset. Indeed, presentations and tutorials will be held throughout the three-day show, giving visitors the chance to experiment with everything from *Maya 4* to the newest graphics tablets.

Along with the presentation of European Junior Animators Award, live prize draws will also be held on each day of the event. For further information visit the event site at www.computerartslive.co.uk.





Computer Arts LIVE '01 will feature the latest iteration of popular graphics creation software, like *Maya* (left)

Judgement days for BAFTA representatives

Decision time arrives as celebrity jurors join established industry pundits in deciding the winners of this year's BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Awards



Last year's recipients of the annual BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Awards

With the judging process for the BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Awards now under way, BAFTA has announced that well known online retailer, Amazon.co.uk, is to sponsor the inaugural Audience Award, in a bid to raise consumer awareness of the event. The winner of the award, voted for by the public, will be announced, along with the other recipients at the final awards ceremony on October 25, at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London.

"We are extremely excited that this year we are launching the Audience Award in partnership with Amazon.co.uk," noted **Sue Thexton**, chair of BAFTA's Interactive Committee. "This partnership will give the awards the spotlight to not only be the interactive industry's leading awards ceremony, but also give them the consumer awareness they deserve."

Voting for the award will be through an online ballot on the company's website, www.amazon.co.uk, which will take place between September 3 and October 22. Voters will be able to choose from a shortlist of the site's ten best selling computer and videogames over the period from September 3 2000 to August 31 2001.

Tamsin Todd, Editor in Chief of Technology Products at Amazon.co.uk, expressed delight at his company's involvement: "We're delighted and honoured to be working with BAFTA to promote and reward creativity and quality in the fast-growing interactive arena. This is a fantastic opportunity for gaming enthusiasts to voice their opinion and we're expecting lots of interest in our onsite poll."

There will also be an onsite competition in which participants can win tickets to attend the final awards ceremony, which will be hosted by an as yet unannounced big name celebrity.

OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



The US version of **Edge** is an eclectic mix of interviews, pin-ups and features on charcoal grills



The Wildcat spray retails at $29.95. Surely an ad more useful than any number of recruitment pages?



Rakugaki Oukoku's combat will be traditional but the ability to create your own creatures is admirable



Two-dimentional images doodled on the sketch pad will magically transform into simplistic 3D creatures





01 Edge: "More of what guys want"

US: A recent trip to the States uncovered what could be **Edge**'s sternest competitor to date. Different in all but name, *Edge* offers what every 20-something male can little afford to ignore: 27 page of C-list models, a special on-set report from 'Son Of The Beach' and a mini-feature on the best summer barbecue equipment currently available in US stores. Ad revenue comes in the form of Wildcat pheromone sprays ('So powerful it's shipped with a box condoms') and Vertical Blast, ('The amazing new 'Hang Time in a Bottle' which guarantees rapid jumping ability'). The two-page videogame review section seems like something of a cop-out.

02 Pen mightier than the sword

Japan: Although a little in the doldrums of late, Taito is back with some originality and ambition. Witness *Rakugaki Oukoku* (*Graffiti Kingdom*). At first glance it's a traditional RPG, but underneath hides what could be one of the most novel interfaces yet seen on a next-gen console. The game's heroine, Hibana, carries a sketch pad which can be produced at key moments in the game to defeat creatures and overcome challenges. Simple shapes can b drawn with the aid of a paintbrush-shaped character called Pengei. The 2D shapes then transform into 3D characters which can then be used to overcome situations in the gameworld. The title uses *Magical Sketch* – a 3D creation tool – and online option will be available for players to exchange their fantastical drawings The game is expected to launch in December 2001 on PS2.

Soundbytes

"I haven't been out for the last three days"
Manic Miner coder, **Matthew Smith**, finally talks to **Edge** after a brief visit to Dewsbury

"While a certain hedgehog is hopelessly outmatched by most sports cars in the babe magnet department, he's got the zero-to-60 category locked down tight"
Expect a rethink of **Edge**'s review style after the US *Edge* informs its readers of *Sonic Adventure 2*'s best qualities

"Come on! Whoooo! Come on! whooo! Come on! Whoooooooooo! [Pause for large intake of breath] Who said sit down? I have four words for you: I. Love. This. Company"
Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's CEO, leaps to his company's defence at a recent conference.

"Because VSAs are directly linked to sales success, these are awarded by the toughest judges of all – the actual games buyers themselves"
ELSPA's **Roger Bennett** finds a more accurate way to judge the quality of *Star Wars: Jedi Power Battles*

03 Outlook faire for EverQuest fans

France: Taking place in a 14th century castle just outside Paris, the *EverQuest* Fan Faire gives players of the popular MMORPG a chance to meet their online friends and adversaries. With treasure hunts, demonstrations by artisans, minstrels and a grand banquet, the event should give attendees an opportunity to live out their wildest role playing fantasies. The event takes place on September 15, and further information can be found at http://everquest.station.sony.com/fanfaire/.

04 Spanking good coin-op fun

Korea: Welcome to the world's first spank 'em up. *Boon-Ga Boon-Ga* tasks player with spanking one to eight characters with a hand shaped peripheral. A sensor detects the amount of discomfort meted out and alters the character's on-screen expression appropriately. Desperate times indeed for arcades.

05 Staying on track

Japan: SCEI title *Yamanotsen* uses the PS2's DVD format to reproduce MPEG2 footage from Tokyo's Yamanote network. The console train sim promises to be the most comprehensive to date, offering permit tests, training options, random events and weather and a guide to all the trains and stations on the Tokyo loop.

06 Pong enters new dimension

Sweden: Beautifully designed and fiendishly difficult, this 3D *Pong*-type game found at www.liquid.se/pong.html is easily the best *ShockWave* title **Edge** has discovered recently. It's not the deepest game ever constructed, but it should keep bat 'n' ball gaming obsessives satisfied until the release of Sega's *Cosmic Smash*.

Data Stream

New manufacturer taken on by Nintendo to develop Game Boy Advance screens: **Matsushita**

Ratio of third-party to first-party support Nintendo anticipates for initial US GameCube development: **6:3**

Eventual thirdparty to firstparty ratio Nintendo expects after launch: **8:2**

Number of broadband Internet kiosks Railtrack is to install into stations around the country: **30**

Price of surfing the net for 15 minutes on the terminals: **£1**

Number of Xbox units Microsoft expect to shift by the end of 2001: **1.5 million**

Percentage increase in high speed internet access to US homes in 2000, according to an FCC report: **158 per cent**

Number of games which have been awarded a Volume Sales Award by ELSPA since they were introduced in October 1999: **80**

Latest three games to achieve a platinum VSA award for 100,000 units sold: ***Quake III Arena*** **(PC),** ***Tekken Tag Tournament*** **(PS2) and** ***Star Wars: Jedi Power Battles*** **(PS2)**

Football strip manufacturer planning to producing a kit especially for *Championship Manager* fans: **Umbro.com**

Percentage Ubi Soft sales growth for the first quarter of 2000/2001: **162 per cent**

Percentage Ubi Soft PC sales growth in the first quarter fuelled by sales of *Myst III*: **40 per cent**

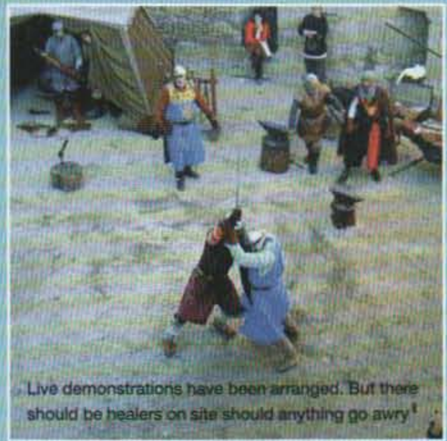
Number of GBA units Nintendo sells every minute, according to Cake Media: **20**

Sales ratio of GBA over all other videogame consoles: **3:2**

03



The *EverQuest* Fan Faire event will take place in a 14th century castle on the outskirts of Paris



Live demonstrations have been arranged. But there should be healers on site should anything go awry

04



Boon-Ga Boon-Ga: possibly the only coin-op allowing users to take revenge on a 'child molester'



Catharsis or freudian fantasy? What the large finger peripheral is used for can only be guessed at

05



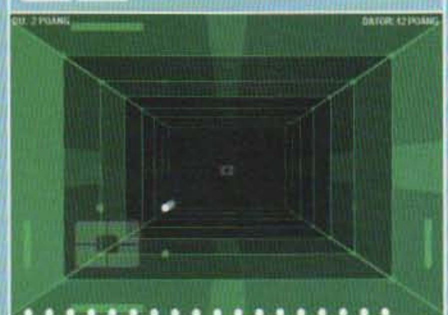
Will MPEG2 be taken from UK networks? Will it include children throwing stones on the line?





Training tests must be passed before moving on to the full simulation. Absolutely gripping stuff

06



3D *Pong* is incredibly difficult, but successfully adds a new dimension to Bushnell's arcade classic



The ASCII joypads are compatible with both PSone and PS2 and will be available in Japan in September



The durable arcade sticks also come in two colours allowing fans to vote for their preferred company



The FightingArena won't make you look cool, but it can add exercise to your gaming routine





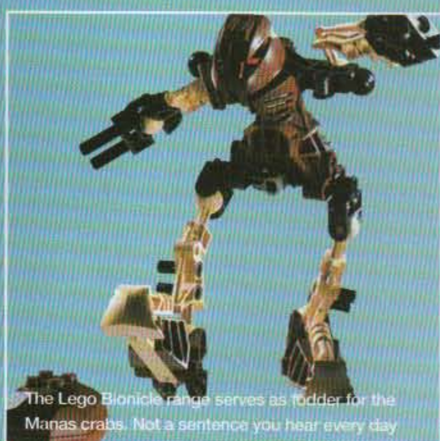
Emily Booth, proving that life in between 'Bits' can still prove lucrative – if the right PVC catsuit is found



Bouff.tv which brings together the usually mutually exclusive worlds of females and the ZX Spectrum



The Manas giant crabs are operated via remote control, ensuring that you can terrorise your pets



The Lego Bionicle range serves as fodder for the Manas crabs. Not a sentence you hear every day

07 SNK and Capcom, sitting in a tree

Japan: The old rivalry between Capcom and SNK has truly been laid to rest with the release of their latest joint venture, *Capcom V SNK 2: Millionaire Fighting 2001*. To celebrate the game's release on September 13 both companies will launch special edition joypads and arcade sticks to give fans a chance to register a vote for their favourite. The peripherals come in two flavours, red (Capcom) and black (SNK). The joypads will retail at ¥3,200 (£18) with the arcade sticks coming in at ¥6,500 (£37).

08 Gaming gets physical

UK: No, it won't allow you to perform Yoshimitsu's spinning harakiri attack particularly effectively, but Thrustmaster's FightingArena does at least let you to exercise and play videogames at the same time. Containing four infra-red sensors and a motion-sensitive mat the Fighting Arena will be in shops in September for £70.

09 Bouff online

UK: Those unconvinced by 'Bits' presenter Emily Booth's gaming credentials should check out her new business venture, www.bouff.tv. Offering T-shirts, posters, autographed prints and an online auction, the site is sure to keep anyone looking for images of girls brandishing home computers satiated – at least until the next series of 'Bits'.

10 Manas from heaven

UK: 'The Manas, fearsome giant crabs, guard Makuta's lair and can only hope to be defeated by Toa who have collected many masks of power'. Press release gibberish aside, Lego's new range of remote-control creatures promises to eat up many an hour around the **Edge** office. Retailing at £70, the Lego crabs work in conjunction with Lego's new Bionicle range. Now, where did we put the Steven Spielberg Movie Making set…

Continue

A new Sonic Team game
A pixellated image has gaming hearts all a-flutter
IDEA 288
Edge beautifully represented in the Japanese arts journal
Edge's office move
The new place just won't be the same without the garlic whiffs

Quit

Sozzled journalists throwing up
Reflections' cream couch will never be same again
The price of *Freak Out*
It should have been £30. Retailers disagreed
Non-story about the GBA screen on 'The Register'
One person, apparently, didn't like it

OUT THERE
MEDIA

11 Phoenix: The Rise And Fall Of Videogames

The latest edition of Leonard Herman's painstaking chronicle of the videogame market (last reviewed in **E**61) is now available, including coverage of the years from 1997-2000. The period starts with the three-way PlayStation/N64/Saturn battle and soon follows the painful birth of Sega's 132bit machine, variously codename Dural, Black Belt and Katana. From here we're whisked through the minutiae of the doomed M2, Project X and Atmark consoles; the arrival of the *Pokémon* phenomenon; and the resurgence in the hand-held market with Game Boy color, SNK Neo-Geo pocket and Tiger's game.com.

The 1999 section covers the launch of Dreamcast, plus the first rumours of PS2, Xbox, Game Boy Advance and Nintendo 2000 aka Project Dolphin aka GameCube. Otherwise, judging by the inclusion of details on Williams' new pinball machine, it was a pretty quiet year. The final chapter on 2000 includes two more stillborn systems – the Indrema L600 and Nuon – and focusses on the appearance of PlayStation2 and the scaled down PSone. By year's end, Herman is recounting the general downturn in the industry and the imminent demise of Dreamcast and Sega as a console manufacturer.

Given that all this is relatively recent history, owners of previous editions might want to wait until the patina of history makes these chapters a little more valuable. Likewise, the self-aggrandising introduction by Ralph H. Baer hardly justifies further expense. However, for collectors, retro enthusiasts and anal retentives everywhere unfamiliar with earlier editions, this is a must. It's dry, frequently bogged down in stupefying detail, and the production values are laughable. But in terms of information, 'Phoenix – The Fall & Rise Of Videogames' is at least deserving of shelf space.

12 Whole Wide World

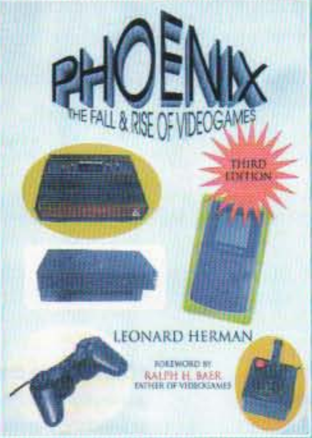
An angry mob on the rampage witnesses the revenge some policemen extract on a girl protester for the murder of their colleagues. As part of a deft cover-up he is removed from his glamourous job as negotiator in the hostage and extortion unit, and is ushered away into the backwater that is the information technology unit.

By chance he gets called up to retrieve some evidence from a horrific murder scene. Why Sophie Booth was killed is a mystery that becomes John's obsession. He sees the case as his way out of the office, back onto the beat and a chance to be a hero.

McAuley manages to turn this relatively simple plot into a techno murder-mystery that has suspense deftly engineered into every page. His predictions that electronic surveillance and CCTVs, which already permeate our lives, will soon become intelligent and ubiquitous, though not profoundly original, are chillingly real. Every other page there is a reference to a CCTV filming someone somewhere. But while some passages show original promise, he frequently disappoints when he falls back on hackneyed cliches. Sometimes he just tries too hard to be cool. 'Whole Wide World' has elements of Ian Banks mixed liberally with a pinch of Agatha Christie and generous lashings of 'The Idiot' s Guide to the Internet'.

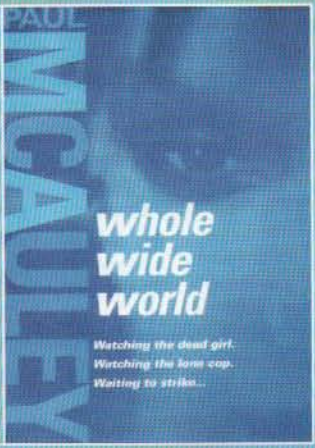
11

Author: **Leonard Herman**
Publisher: **Rolenta Press**
ISBN: **096438485X**



12

Author: **Paul McAuley**
Publisher: **Voyager**
ISBN: **0002259036**



13



Site: **The Groove Alliance**
URL: **www.3dgroove.com**

13 Web site of the month

Always ready to prove that Web-based games can be worthwhile are the chaps over at The Groove Alliance. Using their very own propriety *3D Groove* software has enabled the team to develop browser games which are actually worth playing for longer than it takes to download them. Demos of their best titles are available on the home page with links to the full versions on other sites. In particular, check out their version of 3D pool. Providing an excellent 3D camera, superb ball physics and a list of ranked opponents you can expect the game to eat into a serious amount of your lunch hour. Or two.

14



14 Advertainment

Japan: So far, the majority of PlayStation2 software titles cannot claim to have set the world on fire with their originality, but at least the accompanying advertising campaigns tend to be entertaining, as aptly demonstrated by that of *Mina no Golf 3*, a PS2 game that dominated the sales charts upon its release.

01 Voiceover: "PlayStation2." 02-04 "Okay, lift it up. More… more… okay!" 05-08 "Hole, hole, hole… oh, a hole!" 09 "Yeaaaaaaaaaah!" 10 "Hole, hole, hole…" 11-12 Voiceover: "Golf is wonderful." 13 Voiceover: "Mina no Golf 3." 14-15 "Who are you?"



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Cultural significance: commitment to the cause

RedEye tilts the fan so the cool stale air blows across his face, stifles a yawn and wipes the sweat from his DualShock 2. Hot days at the dead end of summer are the worst. There's the humidity, of course, because next-gen machines belch out enough hot air already. But there's also the shame, defined by popular opinion and loved one's proselytising.

In the critic-forged hierarchy of acceptable arts, gaming's not even on the scale; it's meaningless, a bad habit. Near-translucent skin flickers under 60Hz signals, hands slip from joypads, and the guilt washes and stains in waves, because we've been conditioned into believing we're killing time with zombie eyes. Kids, stop wasting your life on videogames. Listen to the Sega advertising execs, and go throw stones off a pier instead. Or at Bryan Appleyard. RedEye's not fussy.

Appleyard, *The Sunday Times*' science and philosophy critic whose job is to sort the worthy from the worthless, has glanced at gaming and judged it wholly redundant. His words, speaking on Radio 4's Today programme: "They [videogames] are a hypnotic dull procedure. It is not like engaging with a work of art." RedEye's words, muttered with resignation shortly afterwards: "Surprise. Whatever."

It hurts, but it's nothing new. We've always been an easy target, and Appleyard's sentiments are just those of someone who knows nothing, and, depressingly, doesn't care enough to inquire. It's so much simpler to dismiss something when you're ignorant. "One of the great battles we face today is to persuade our children away from the computer games towards what can only be described as worthwhile books," points out Prince Charles. He pauses, and rephrases: "None of us can underestimate the importance of books in an age dominated by the computer screen and constant wish for immediate gratification." The royal didn't hammer his point home by carving 'stupefying our children' on Phil Harrison's forehead and then setting him alight. That might have been a little less predictable.

But then here's the killer: RedEye's esteemed colleague Mr Poole ('Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames', Fourth Estate) also gets drawn in. "Game-playing at the expense of reading is certainly a bad thing," he drawls to BBC News Online, "But game-playing at the expense of other pursuits, such as watching television or skateboarding, doesn't seem like such a menace to society." RedEye glances sideways, stretches out a leg, and kicks his skateboard under his bed. Wouldn't want the other columnists getting wind of another bad habit.

Seriously, Steven, aside from the prospective knighthood, what's to gain by ranking entertainment like discrete data? Insisting on a high-art hierarchy means dismissing entire cultural movements with a casually shrugged sentence – just witness Appleyard's ill-educated stumblings above. That's how it's always been, and that's why videogaming needs promoters, not apologists. We're damned by idiots who know nothing about us, or what we choose to take as our hobby, and the only way that's going to change is by insisting that our art is entirely valid. In short: et tu, Pooley?

Besides 'certainly a bad thing'? RedEye will accept that, yes, Catcher in the Rye may well take down an *Army Men* title in terms of some indefinable value, but play off *Deus Ex* against the 'Big Brother 2' book and the result's reversed. Moreover, Spector's work has inspired more of RedEye's friends to consider Voltaire and Chesterton than any number of dumb best-selling neon-coloured whimsical BritLit holiday novels. Then RedEye recalls the tale of a journalist who, reviewing Revolution's *Broken Sword*, became so engrossed in the Templar mythos that she jacked in her job in favour of research, and, eventually, wrote a book on it herself. Two examples of how good games, just like good films, good comics, and good books, inspire.

'Catcher In The Rye' may well take down an *Army Men* title, but play off *Deus Ex* against the 'Big Brother 2' book, and the result's reversed

Skip back centuries, and Giotto, Da Vinci and Michelangelo were house painters. They were good, no question – if you wanted an expensive frieze on the wall of your house or lounge illustrated with a tasteful picture of your wife as the Virgin Mary, you'd get the likes of them and their teams in – but they were still house painters. They fought for more, and, with time, appreciation of their work snowballed, leading to Vasari's 'Lives Of The Artists', which, by detailing the careers of the author and those who preceded him, promoted the concept of painting as something more than just pretty colours to impress the neighbours.

The point? This is gaming's renaissance. The creators are artists, and we should be fighting. If we do, there's a future where, presuming we still exist and that evolution hasn't turned us into media-ignoring laser-eating space bats, humanity's perception of our passion will have progressed to a stage where people don't take it as read that books are better or TV is worse. It will be an appreciated art, it will be acceptable, and long-gone critics like Bryan Appleyard will, retrospectively, be dismissed. For now, though, all we can do is believe in our subject and never, ever sell it out.

None of which disqualifies the value of fresh air, of course. If we're to trust a thousand gaming future visions then we should enjoy the sun-drenched environment while it lasts, because pretty soon it's going to be paved to with rainy black tarmac texturing and chunked to the skyline with crate-filled warehouses. Fine, except high tech and grass don't mix and, right now, RedEye wants to enjoy his hobby. RedEye thinks he has a solution.

He drops the joypad, flicks off the PS2 and stumbles out of his house, into the small garden and the bright light and searing heat that envelopes it. There's a chair in the middle of the lawn, bathed in a halo of sunshine; on it, a forgotten copy of Poole's opus ('Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames', Fourth Estate). RedEye grins. The chair wobbles, but a well-wedged dissection of game culture ought to be enough to stabilise it, proving that, hey, maybe books are more valuable than games after all. Done and fixed, RedEye sits down, takes in his surroundings – it really is a beautiful day – and slips the GBA from his pocket. He's going to enjoy the summer while it lasts, because, tomorrow, he'll be aching for a backlight.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

AI: the great white lie of the industry

Of late it has become routine to promote a new videogame by trumpeting the virtues of its 'realistic' AI. But, at best, the whole notion covers a multitude of sins, and at worst serves as a contradiction in terms. Apart from the rare games that try to create learning intelligences within the gameworld, such as *Black & White*, the term AI is often used as a kind of shorthand for what is really something else entirely. This column is not about true AI, but about unmasking the impostors.

We all know that if many games had anything like realistic AI, they would be completely unplayable. Despite the amusing precedent set by the portly Steven Seagal in his naval-themed action movies, a single soldier has less than a squirrel's chance on Mount Etna of successfully storming a military vessel. To judge by his limited punch/punch/spin-kick/strangle repertoire of barehand combat, Solid Snake doesn't even know aikido. Hence the 'AI' in *Metal Gear Solid 2* actually takes the form of generous lashings of dumbness. Understandably, a guard will become suspicious on seeing a wet cardboard box in an interior corridor; on the other hand, if you get seen and then evade long enough, the guards will eventually forget they ever saw you, rather than initiate a permanent vessel-wide alert until they hunt you down and shoot your face off.

It helps that the guards are so ocularly challenged, being cursed with a combination of tunnel vision and acute myopia. But it would be trivially easy for a developer to give his enemies 20/20 vision, military-standard marksmanship, ruthless perseverance and a penchant for team flanking strategies that would mean game over every time. So this species of AI is actually a deliberate ramping down of the enemies' optimal intelligence. It's artificial stupidity, and the developer chooses the right level of dumbness to make the game a reasonable challenge.

Artificial stupidity is the rule in beat 'em ups, too: *Soul Calibur* would be unplayable if your opponent blocked all your blows with perfect green parries every time and then unleashed swingeing 10-hit combos. The developers must put chinks in their defensive armour, and leave the player to discover how to exploit them. Most action games partake of AS in one way or another – even the supposedly realistic FPS products such as *CounterStrike*, with its accurately modelled recoil and proper guns. In the finely tuned stupidity of its enemies, *CounterStrike* is no more realistic than the joyously deranged scarf-controlled rubber-world sim *Freak Out*.

AI can also suffer from the dreaded evil of incoherence – that moment when you realise the game isn't actually playing by its own rules. In *Red Faction*, there are some nods towards believable AI – in the sections where, disguised as a scientist or businessman, you learn to evade detection by keeping your head down and not looking directly at any of the guards. While this isn't actually 'realistic' – because it's not necessary for someone to look at you before you recognise them – it's a logical simplification. But *Red Faction* becomes incoherent when you discover that the guards apparently have a sixth sense for weapons. At a distance where they wouldn't normally see you at all, you only have to pull out a gun to be mobbed by the enemy. This sits ill with the rest of the enemy behaviour, and is a rule that you work around sulkily, rather than one whose challenging strictures you actually enjoy.

Game AI can also feel incoherent in a different way when it appears that you are operating under different rules from those of your competitors. While it is arithmetically necessary for the player to be given deadlier abilities than the enemies in a one-against-many killfest, it becomes annoying when the situation is reversed in a straight test of skills – as seems endemic in the racing genre. In *Metropolis Street Racer*, you are racing for kudos and skill points, and so you get penalised for collisions with other cars. But the other cars mercilessly ram you from behind at every opportunity. They don't worry about losing points at all: for them, it appears to be a straight, aggressive race to the finish. So, in effect, there are two different races happening on the same track, and yours is harder.

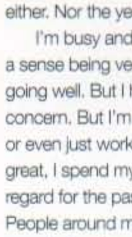
In *Gran Turismo 3*, if you're powersliding round a bend and an enemy car clips your rear, you spin out. Fine: that's what would happen in real life. (In real life, cars don't stick madly to the racing line at top speed no matter what's in front of them: they tend to want to avoid collisions. Still, okay, it's a bumper-car sim.) But however hard you ram the other cars from behind, they will never, ever spin. They'll just give an insouciant little waggle of the back end and then speed off into the distance. You're often driving a more powerful car to compensate, and the enemy drivers are made artificially stupid by braking earlier than they need to round every corner. So the rules are levelled out, but asymmetrically: in a way that, finally, feels like a bit of a cheat.

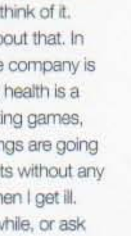
The result of the industry-wide abuse of the term 'artificial intelligence' is to make games that are marketed in this way all the more disappointing when we discover their inconsistencies. There are still limitations, of course, even in the astonishing leaps made in 'true AI' games such as *Black & White*. You cannot teach your tiger to play chess, for example. And while Molyneux continues to refine his neural algorithms, other games look set to extend the idea that convincing AI mechanics – rather than having to chase the goal of believable human behaviour – can be built around the activities of non-human creatures.

We all know that if many games had anything like realistic artificial intelligence, they would be completely unplayable

The useful thing about the flocking behaviour of small animals, as featured in the upcoming *Herdy Gerdy* and *Pikmin*, is that it is relatively computationally cheap compared to modelling human behaviour, but its rewards in believability are great. (With a ZX Spectrum and the right rules, as I discovered in my youth, you can give decent impression of birds flocking slowly around the screen.) And until the day arrives in the sci-fi future when you can have a convincing natural-language conversation with an NPC, all we ask for is a coherent illusion of life inside the machine.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Launch games: striking the perfect balance

Sadly, I'm not feeling very well at the moment. The reason is, as I've said several times since I started to write this column, I'm dead busy. This year I won't have any summer vacations. I didn't have any last year either. Nor the year before, come to think of it.

I'm busy and I can't do much about that. In a sense being very busy is a sign the company is going well. But I have to say that my health is a concern. But I'm known to like creating games, or even just work full stop. When things are going great, I spend my time on my projects without any regard for the passing of time. But then I get ill. People around me tell me to rest a while, or ask me whether I'm okay. Of course, my wife is also very concerned about me: "I'm quite worried about you, but even if I ask you to stop a little you would continue, right? Well, because you like what you do, do what you feel is right." She gives up in the end.

Okay, this column has started pretty downbeat, but let's get to something brighter. I can tell you that the development of *Super Monkey Ball* on GameCube has just been completed, a little before I wrote this column. Getting this project completed in time for the launch has meant six terrible months. Last year, Sega announced its multiplatform move. Since then, I have focused my thoughts on GameCube and I started this project by being regularly in contact with Nintendo. At the beginning, I had to figure out with my staff what my objective would be with this title.

For example, because we are making a game for a Nintendo platform, the users are younger, so one option was to produce a high-quality, appealing title aimed squarely at this market. Or maybe we shouldn't consider market issues and just make a 'typical Sega' game. Then people started to ask what a 'typical Sega' game is like, which is a good question. And then it was pointed out that because of 'typical Sega' games, Dreamcast failed. Everybody was arguing. At that time, I really was quite afraid. So I decided to set a few guidelines.

First, regardless of the platform (Nintendo or Sony), we should aim to create something which would reflect our spirit, a project which would be high quality and represent a challenge for us. In addition to this, come the end of development we have to have a title which could be characterised by its great content – its fun, if you will. Bearing all these concepts in mind, we decided *Super Monkey Ball* was perfect for the job. Then we had to determine how the game would fit on the platform.

Initially, we studied Nintendo's market. Then, since the game would need to be ready for launch, we had to quantify Sega's development know-how and speed. Finally, we knew we had to deliver a title which would deliver a lot of fun, regardless of whether or not it proved a smash hit. We would prefer to produce a title we can be proud of that offers users a prolonged experience that is fun to play at home.

So, let's review those points in detail. The first represents our challenge in respect to this new market. To date, we've worked hard to deliver a great level of technology or realism. We have no experience in making something based on a character. I thought it would be great chance for us to get this experience, so I decided to make *Super Monkey Ball*. The second point is interesting, and it's that we felt it was important to move quickly to underline Sega's move towards a multiplatform strategy. In the light of this, I was able to get my hands on the very first GameCube development kit.

People are always telling me we did a great job to be ready in time. Well, if I'm honest, I wanted to show how great I am

I can't tell you when I did that, as there are still many details that remain confidential. Anyway, I was very concerned about the release date, as I did not know when the game could be released. But since I told everybody the game would be ready for the launch, I had no choice other than to hit whichever deadline we were set. I told my people it would be a great challenge for us – and I would like to apologise to them now – but this last point holds a certain significance for me.

At the beginning of the year I have a little habit of deciding my 'game design theme' for the coming 12 months. This year I chose to focus on rethinking the relation between developers and the market. Towards the end of last year we released *Monkey Ball* in arcades, and have had some feedback. "Playing it, we found it great. For example, if we go to the arcade with a girlfriend, it is great to play *Monkey Ball*, but in today's arcades cute games are not that common." We also heard: "The game does not fit current arcade orientations." These arguments cropped up time and time again. So, the game cute image may not have matched the market, but at the same time feedback was great concerning the game content, so I started to wonder what the game's impact on the consumer market could be.

I spent a long time thinking about this idea, and then I decided to bring *Monkey Ball* to consoles. Since I wanted to take into account the first two points as well, I had to come out with a new, more ambitious design. In respect of this, I saw three key points. First, just because it was a conversion of an arcade title, that didn't mean we could just make a simple port of the original version. We had to renew the original design to fit it with the new market. Second, since the game's content would have to be extended in order to fit the consumer market, we would include six play modes and six sub games to extend the game's duration. The third and final point is we would have to be ready for the Japanese launch on September 14.

Then further problems posed themselves. How would we do it? Questions rained down. However, I have to say that everybody worked hard, and well. People around me are always telling me we did a great job to be ready in time. Well, if I'm honest, I wanted to show how great I am, but if I really was, then I wouldn't be in such bad shape right now.

If there is one reason why we were able to hit deadline, it is because we have such extensive arcade experience. We had to deal with new boards on a regular basis, so my staff was used to adapting to new technology. I really think it is a great advantage we have. In that sense, we are among the very best in the industry – real pros at making games for a hardware launch.

The whole process may appear very simple on reading this, but in reality it is incredibly difficult. Nevertheless, I'm relieved we did it. I feel quite confident now, although this is only the beginning.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Edge's most wanted

Jedi Outcast: Jedi Knight II
Judging from a demo at Activate. The Force is strong in this one, which should get the pulses of all 'Star Wars' nerds racing (and lets face it, who isn't one).



(PC) LucasArts

Star Wars Galaxies
The E3 demo – shown behind closed doors – displayed enough to make this one of the most exciting videogame prospects for a long, long time.



(PC) LucasArts

Rogue Squadron II: Rogue Leader
The N64 version offered incredibly enjoyable set-pieces only spoiled by poor draw distance. Expect the dog fights to improve dramatically for GameCube.



(GameCube) LucasArts

Racer II: Racer Revenge
Although the original wasn't particularly well received, it did possess a convincingly chariot-like handling. Expect more 'Ben Hur'-style thrills from the sequel.



(PS2) LucasArts

The burden of choice

Because you can't play them all, can you?

Of all the issues vying for editorial space, the subject of an abundance of quality in videogames would seem of little importance. But while single format holders often bemoan a lack of good titles for their machine (N64 and Dreamcast software drying up, while PlayStation2 has hardly been inundated with AAA titles so far), for those owning all the major platforms an enviable yet burdensome decision must be made every month: which games must be rejected in favour of more worthy titles.

Take this **Edge** staffer's list of games currently in the in-tray: *Gran Turismo 3*, *Ape Escape*, *Ring of Red*, *Super Metroid* and *Mario Kart Advance*. Some new games; some old. Some which were simply missed the first time around. In fact, any one of these titles alone could seriously take up all the monthly leisure time set aside for playing videogames. Is this scenario any different for you? Faced with a catalogue of quality titles – both old and new – it's easy to become overwhelmed and simply dip into many while never truly exploring the limits of one. Gone are the days of ripping open the latest issue of *Crash!* or *Zzap! 64* to see which title had been bestowed the highest accolade, purchasing the game from the local indie, and then thrashing the game to within an inch of its life. It's a situation unlikely to return considering the amount of titles Xbox, GameCube and PS2 will add to the current catalogue.

And the titles which must be abandoned for another day? *Shenmue*, *Skies Of Arcadia*, *Final Fantasy IX*. Alas, such lengthy narrative games may linger in the 'pending' tray for an awfully long time. Discerning gamers must now plan their gameplaying schedule more carefully than ever before. This is a situation which also raises key issues for developers: with so much competition they must ensure that players remain hooked for as long as possible. Though *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* is an amazing experience, it requires an incredible investiture of time and effort. You can't simply stop playing in the middle of the water temple and expect to come back weeks later to pick up all the puzzle threads. A sustained attack needs to be scheduled in.

While such a situation is obviously preferable to a lack of quality software, occasionally you can feel the inexorable pull of transient games which require as little mental exertion – and time commitment – as possible. Indeed, the simplicity of www.jippii.co.uk mini-golf often beats any epic narrative Squaresoft can throw your way.











Stuntman

Reflections has spent the last ten years redefining the driving game. Now the company is set to take the genre off into yet more uncharted territory





Stuntman is a game of set pieces. The skip ramp on the right is a typical challenge requiring players to go up on two wheels. When the stunts are done, the level ends – there's no aimless driving about





When a studio cites 'The Dukes Of Hazzard' and 'The Blues Brothers' as major inspirations for its latest driving game, you know you're not about to witness yet another oh-so-authentic *Gran Turismo* wannabe. But as this is Reflections, you should have known that anyway.

Responsible for the offbeat PlayStation hits *Destruction Derby* and *Driver*, the company has never treated videogame driving in quite the same way as other studios. *Stuntman* is no exception to the self-imposed rule. Here, as you'd expect from its title, you take on the role of a Hollywood stunt driver employed to work in six consecutive movies. You start off in a low-budget London-based gangster film and work through a 'Dukes Of Hazzard' boondocks America romp, a political thriller, an 'Indiana Jones'-style adventure and a Hong Kong action flick, before taking on the ultimate job as a stuntman on a James Bond-style secret agent blockbuster.

Stuntman takes the adrenaline-charged chases from _Driver_ and focuses all the action into short, sharp bursts

For each of these films you're required to perform a series of stunt sequences. These may be as simple as pulling a burnout after a robbery, or avoiding a truck pulling out onto the street and then crashing into a fruit stall. However, later set-pieces will have you performing, say, a split-second jump through an open freight carriage on a moving train, or exactly reproducing the legendary broken bridge barrel jump from 'The Man With The Golden Gun'. When a stunt is completed, you get marked on style and accuracy – 75 per cent is the bare minimum to progress, but anything more will open up extra features in the game's Stunt Construction mode.

In essence, *Stuntman* takes the adrenaline-charged car chases from *Driver* and focuses all the action into short, sharp bursts. The handling and control configuration are very similar, encouraging the use of 180°s, burnouts, etc. But here, the dynamics have been completely overhauled. The cars can now be rolled (a physical reality frustratingly missing from *Driver*), and after collisions wheels, side panels and other chassis parts explode in every direction. And whatever does come off remains on the road for you to drive over and crush just a little bit more.

Adding to the impressive realism are the highly detailed car models. The artists have actually constructed every layer from the engines and the chassis to the interiors, and the physics engine allows for various collision strengths, so the panels can dent gradually as you accrue more damage, or detach themselves completely. With such



The game employs real techniques from the stunt world, including cannon rolls, where a controlled explosion forces the car to turn over





Knocking things over (above left) is, of course, a vital element of the Hollywood chase scene. Between stages you also take part in stunt shows (above right), which should appeal to redneck gamers

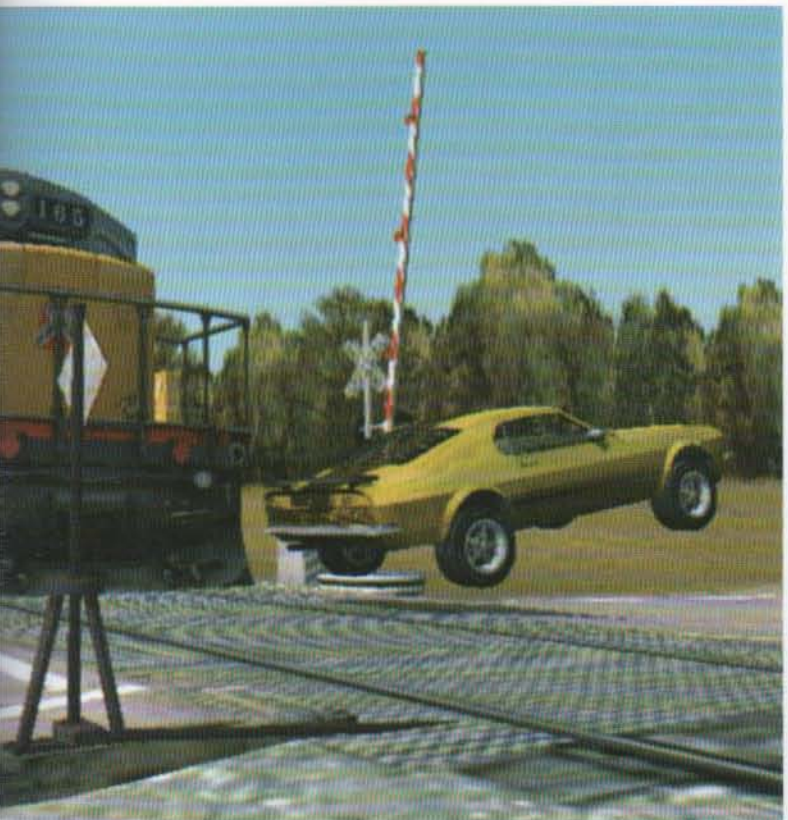




Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Reflections**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q2 2002**

Memories are made of this

***Stuntman* uses mip-mapping on textures, as well as fullscreen anti-aliasing to minimise jaggies on horizontal edges – a factor that affected most first generation PlayStation2 games. Edmonson also points out that many first-gen titles used only the texture memory to store graphical data, but the machine's DMA facility allows for the shuffling of data between different areas of RAM on the fly, providing more potential space for the visuals. Most second- and third-generation titles will take advantage of this facility.**



The 'Dukes Of Hazzard' stage includes challenges based around this rural railway setting. Reflections is planning a section where you jump from a bridge onto the top of a train and then drive along it



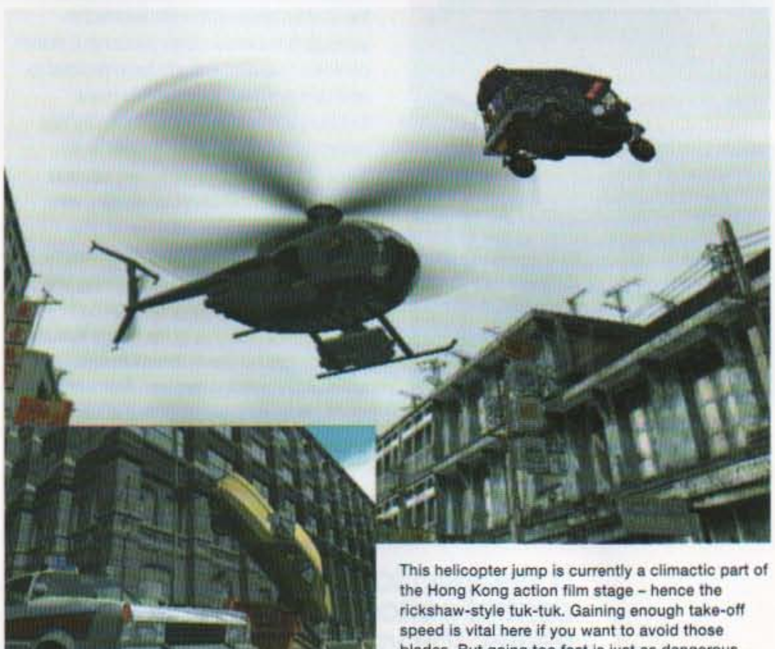




an emphasis on automotive destruction, Reflections has quite wisely decided against trying to get its vehicles officially licensed, but most players won't have too much trouble identifying key sports cars from the last 30 years. Not that the whole game is based around sports cars – players will also find themselves performing stunts in a tuk-tuk (on the Hong Kong action film level) and a skidoo (in the political thriller sequence).

As *Driver* veterans would expect, the game is also infused with plenty of side-order extras. At the end of each level you're shown a trailer of the movie you've just worked on which includes footage of your own stunts – a neat little take on the standard replay feature. Between films players also get to show-off in an arena-based stunt show – the sort highly popular in America's southern states. Here you can jump over multiple cars, through flaming hoops and into clattering barrels, all to the resonant cheers of your white trash fans. There's even a Stunt Construction mode where stunts can be built and tested using a variety of ramps and destructible objects (the more points gained in the main game, the more of these ramps and objects are opened up to play with). Another imaginative and interesting touch.

Admittedly, there are worries that the game's highly specific staccato structure will eventually infuriate gamers looking for the relative freedom offered by *Driver*. However, the chance to zoom up ramps and through buildings, sending pedestrians running in terror, will appeal to anyone who's ever enjoyed a Bond film (and as that must include about 80 per cent of the industrial world, Reflections should have few concerns). Plus, the stunt arena and construction kit extras – along with the promise of more *Driver*-style post-pub mini-games – should add enough breadth to the experience for those still unconvinced. Besides, as Limp Bizkit once sang, there's just something immensely satisfying about breaking things.



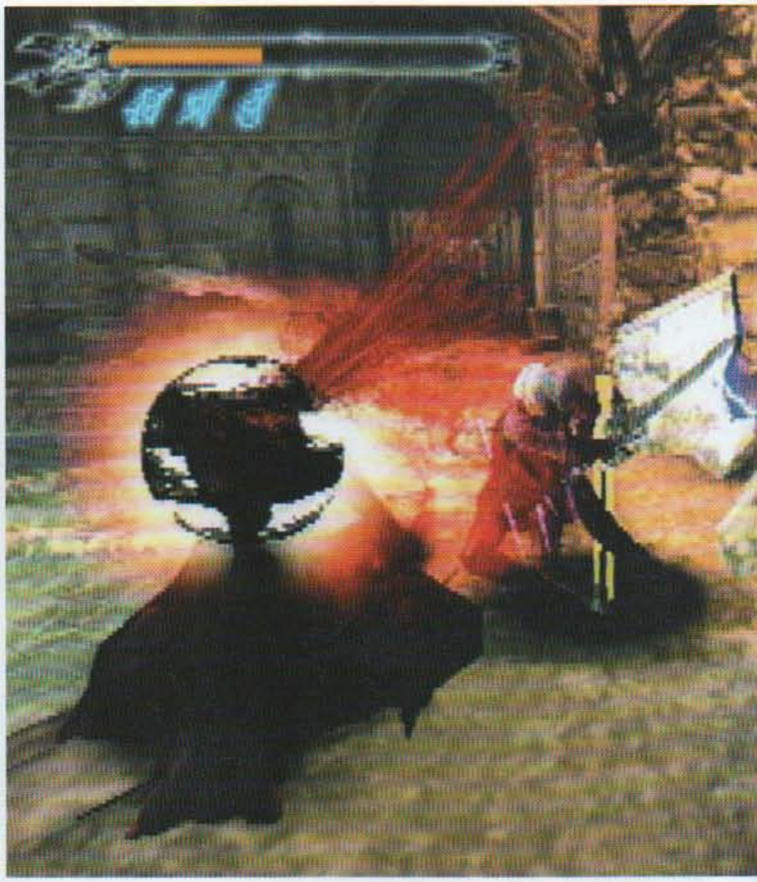
This helicopter jump is currently a climactic part of the Hong Kong action film stage – hence the rickshaw-style tuk-tuk. Gaining enough take-off speed is vital here if you want to avoid those blades. But going too fast is just as dangerous...

Devil May Cry

As PlayStation2 gathers momentum, it requires the support of original games. Happily, the creators of *Resident Evil* are doing their best to come up with one



Dante's multi-levelled moves and abilities are subject to his weapon and the game environment, meaning that the same button will not necessarily create the same attack move each time it is pressed







***Devil May Cry* is expected to feature some 15 types of enemy, with each new breed introduced in a short filmic sequence. Just for a change**

When the news first broke about *Devil May Cry*, it was thought to be a spiritual successor to the *Resident Evil* franchise. The project leaders – producer Shinji Mikami and director **Hideki Kamiya** – are both veterans of the horror series, and the Gothic nature of the title seemed to perfectly complement their successful, noirish portfolio. However, the duo have decided to abandon the cinematic, fixed-camera structure with this title – *Devil May Cry* has developed into a character-based action game, introducing Dante, a new, stronger breed of hero: half-devil/half-human, and a rather adept swordsman.

Since its conception as a PlayStation-bound adventure bearing the working title *Resident Evil 4*, *Devil May Cry* has had attention lavished on it to the extent that the two incarnations barely resemble one another. The version that was *Resident Evil 4*, for example, was storyboarded to take place on a boat. Kamiya-san talks **Edge** through his thinking: "The *Resident Evil* series started in a mansion, then it moved into in a small city. I thought it would be an interesting idea to make the next installment take place aboard a boat."

"I decided to move away from the central concept of the *Resident Evil* series: the vulnerable hero against more powerful enemies..."

But it wasn't long before the PlayStation reign showed signs of coming to an end, and Kamiya-san was charged with moving the game to PS2. Urged by Mikami-san, the director also took the opportunity to set the game on dry land and to shift the gameplay to a style quite unlike *Resident Evil*. "I prefer real action gameplay to straight horror," he says. "I really think that is what I do best. Mikami-san understands this. He told me to forget about fear, which is the emotion that carried the *Resident Evil* games to success, and to create the *Devil May Cry* project around a new theme."

With new hardware and a new mission statement, Kamiya-san and crew set to re-inventing the game and its atmosphere. "I decided to move away from the central concept of the *Resident Evil* series: the vulnerable hero against more powerful enemies," he says. "I preferred to keep the player focused on combat in a very cool style. I decided to keep a few things like the gun sounds, the moves and the motion animation, but I wanted to use all these realistic elements in a radically different style of game."

Kamiya-san is adamant in his belief that players should never be stalled too long by a puzzle. "*Devil May Cry* is fundamentally an action game, so puzzles aren't important – they shouldn't stop the flow of action," he explains. "For example, if you have to study a panel and think about how to make it right you're allowing the game tension to drop. This game is all about the action, so the player will focus on defending himself with the sword and with the character's moves and so on. I don't want to include extensive text, either."

Sometime during mid-2000 the project evolved beyond the familiar *Resident Evil* framework, and that's when Kamiya-san anc crew knew they had a potential new franchis

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **November (Japan) TBC (UK)**








on their hands. "Last year we understood that the project wasn't looking like *Resident Evil* anymore," he admits, "so we decided to rename the project *Devil May Cry*."

Kamiya-san cites everything from *Starfox* and *Zelda* to manga as his influences, but maintains that his own ideas have inspired the bulk of the project. Perhaps taking a lesson from Miyamoto-san, Kamiya-san has instilled Dante with a magical in-game presence. He is a strong character, and as such he adds substance to the gameplay and its environments.

Dante's strengths come from a balanced combination of stylised gunplay, an extensive move repertoire and smooth execution of inventive sword battle sequences. Variety is further increased by there being four swords the player can choose between, each with its own allocation of moves and power-ups (which can also be pumped up within a structure of intensity levels). There is a selection of other weapons available, too. The numerous combinations created by all these variants give Dante a striking versatility.

"I usually use the shotgun," Kamiya-san offers by way of example, "but other people use different weapons. You must understand each weapon's merits and limits, and then apply that knowledge to how your weapon behaves in the situation and environment you are in."

While Kamiya-san divulged little information on the issue of additional playable characters, there have been indications in a teaser movie from Capcom that Dante does not have sole occupancy of the Character Selection screen. Trish, a blonde woman, will also be playable for part of the game.

At the time of writing, the Japanese release is currently in the final stages of QA testing. Kamiya-san is confident: "I hope this will become a series," he says. "I can't speak too much on the possibility of follow-ups, but you can be sure they won't be in the form of *Super Devil May Cry Turbo*."





Enemies and bosses offer a completely new challenge – they have the ability to morph mid-battle. Beware the panther which, once airbound, can change into a knife and slice you as it plummets



Gun Metal

Format: Xbo
Publisher: Rag
Developer: In-house (Sheffield Studio
Origin: U
Release: Q1 200

Rage's debut release on Xbox features armoured robots, endless rolling hills, massive attack craft and an entire world waiting to be demolished. Sophisticated, it ain't



As an antidote to the already endless list of gritty, autumnal-hued and hyper-realistic Xbox titles, comes *Gun Metal* – a shoot 'em up with a one-sentence purpose: take everything down, whether it moves or not.

The USP of the title is that the player's character, a 10m tall armoured mechanical warrior, is able – in true robots-in-disguise fashion – to transform from battledroid to jet fighter. This facility enables combat to continue in the air as well as on the ground; it's possible to soar above the cloud cover and view the scenery from on high, although the shoot-on-sight action necessitates relatively low-level flying.

Admittedly, the ability to destroy everything in your path does have some appeal. As well as taking down the opposing forces – from hordes of ground troops to gigantic battle fortresses – it's possible to lay waste to entire cities, burn crops, smash boulders and even raze forests, complete with their ambling, prehistoric denizens. In short, everything in view is fair game. Also, the Xbox hard drive is utilised in order to record the location of any damage, so subsequent missions have a lasting reminder of the carnage that's gone before.



The pleasantly stylised hardware really adds to the atmosphere of the game. And, of course, you get to blow it all up...

Cosmetically, *Gun Metal* has little to be ashamed of, with impressive vistas rendered as far as the eye can see (echoes of *Star Wars: Starfighter*), dense vegetation and a pleasingly comic-book aesthetic to the architecture and vehicles.

Mission statement

Rage promises 25 'diverse and engaging' missions over which to dole out the destruction. The action is fairly freeform, and it's up to the individual exactly how to deal with enemy forces in terms of prioritising targets, weaponry and ground- or air-based attack. However, various supporting characters appear during combat, directing your attention towards specific targets. At certain junctures the player is asked to defend pockets of allied forces: their continued existence isn't vital, but completing missions is easier with them than without.

The length and complexity of missions varies, from five-minute sorties to 20-minute epic battles. And to add an element of surprise, Rage has also implemented a series of scripted set-pieces in which the mission takes an immediate turn for the worse, forcing the player to think on their feet.

Depending on how well these elements are implemented, *Gun Metal* could endear itself to the pick-up-and-play crowd, or it could backfire, ending up little more than a next-gen *Krazy Ivan*, and infuriating those expecting a PC-style RTS.









Gun Metal's mixture of ground- and air-based assault combined with rolling, open environs should provide an engagingly freeform shoot 'em up. A mixture of mission styles, set-pieces and tactical weapon selection should generate enough variety to keep console gamers content

Crash

Format: **Xbox, PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Rage**
Developer: **In-house (Sheffield Studio)**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q1 2002**

Take a first-generation PlayStation favourite, throw in the power of Xbox, mix with a generous amount of visual aplomb – then sit back and watch the carnage

Early PlayStation adopters will remember the uncomplicated fun of the *Destruction Derby* series – or the first iteration, at least – in which cars were driven as they really should be: at speed and into one another. As the franchise wore on, the 'destruction' element was minimised until the title was reduced to a straightforward racer with only the potential for some small-claims bodywork damage.

Taking its cue from the Reflections original title, Rage has produced a crash 'em up for the Xbox, unfettered by constraints of pit stops, tyre changes, engine tweaks or lap times. The basic idea is select a vehicle and remain the last one running, although various game options have contestants chasing high scores and fastest write-off times.

The move to Xbox has expedited a huge leap in the realtime deformation of the models. Each car now boasts a poly count of more than 10,000, allowing for very high level of detail and subsequent degree of damage. Thus your choice of ride – classic hot rod, muscle car or performance motor – now sports a user-definably garish paint job, and can be written off in a variety of creative and ingenious ways. Grilles are dented, doors dinged, bonnets removed and, ultimately, your pride and joy reduced to a smoking wreck.

As you might expect, the choice of car has a major bearing on the outcome of each event: latterday performance cars are as fragile as they are effeminate, while the '50s American hot-rods have the robust constitution of an outdoor lavatory.

Accidental cover

As is de rigeur for any self-respecting racing game, *Crash* has an extensive replay option, affording the player a chance to re-live their vehicle's demise time and time again, and from different vantage points.

All this automotive genocide takes place across eight locations, each containing three events. Progress is made by achieving a set target on each event, which then unlocks the next. There are also four challenge areas, plus secret levels. Naturally, a multiplayer mode is in evidence, providing twoplayer competition (with a choice of vertical or horizontal split-screen), or a full, fourplayer mêlée.

Crash is set to debut on Xbox around the European launch, and a PS2 version will follow next Autumn. So far, Rage suggests the overall mechanics and game design will be identical across both systems, though it'll play to their individual strengths.



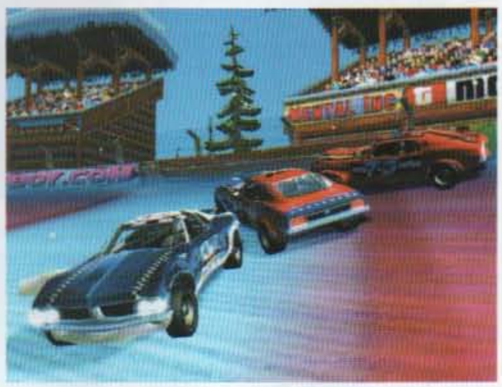




Playing like the last-man-standing arena in the first *Destruction Derby*, *Crash* players need only worry about how long their car is going to last. Fortunately, unlockable events and various multiplayer modes should help increase longevity. If Rage fulfil its promises, *Crash* will, at least, provide one of the more lighthearted outings on the system when Xbox appears in the spring of next year







Shenmue II

Format: Dreamca
Publisher: Se
Developer: Sega-AI
Origin: Jap
Release: November (Japan) TBC (U

The story of Ryo continues with this, the next five chapters in the *Shenmue* series. Yu Suzuki elaborates on how to marry size and ambition with entertainment



Size matters. And with the sprawling Dreamcast adventure, *Shenmue*, talented game designer **Yu Suzuki** created a monster. Now, sitting in a small conference room with an interpreter at his side, he's humble enough to chuckle about it. "He always aims too high," his interpreter explains. Suzuki-san spreads his hands apart and says, simply, "Too big."

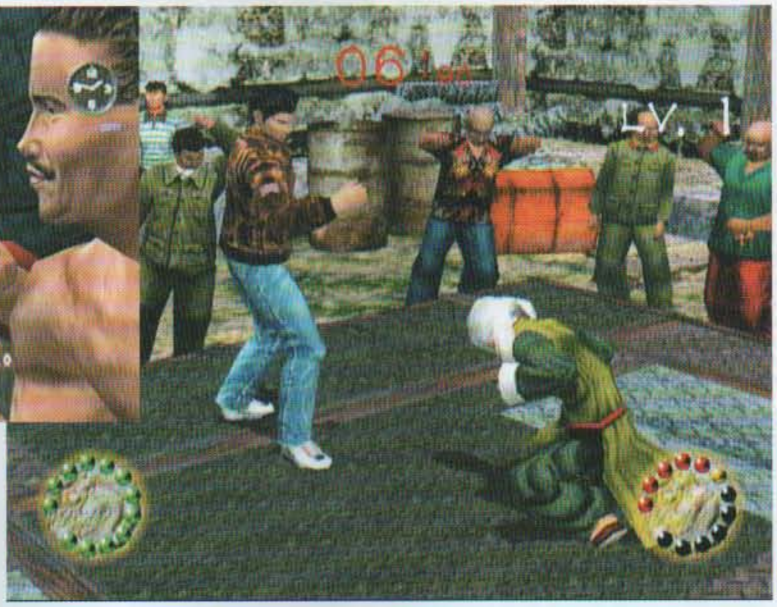
Suzuki-san conceptualised *Shenmue* as an epic with a cast of thousands. Now, as its four-disc sequel nears completion, the Sega-AM2 head finds himself grappling with a story that might be too titanic to tell. *Shenmue II* includes chapters two to six of Ryo's tale. Once again, the plot follows Ryo as he moves from Japan to China in an attempt to run down the vile Lan Di and recover the strange and mysterious Phoenix Mirror.

This new game begins with an introductory movie that highlights the events from chapter one. After that, everything is new. *Shenmue II* features more than 1,000 characters and approximately 150 different action-sequence Quick-Time Events (QTEs), as compared to the original's 350 characters and 70 events. Suzuki-san says the sequel will feature longer play time and will progress in a more dynamic way. "The biggest complaint about *Shenmue*," he says, "was that players who like to rush through a game had to stop and talk with each person they met." Now, players will have the option of dashing to the finish, albeit against the recommendation of the creator, who claims you would miss "a third – or maybe even half – of the game."



QTEs make another, more frequent, appearance and a firstperson fighting mode is promised to complement the traditional thirdperson option







Second time around, past Suzuki efforts *Out Run* and *After Burner* undergo the *Shenmue* emulation treatment (above). Which should ensure Ryo momentarily ignores his quest to avenge his father





While a stranger in the curious land of China, Ryo will get to venture into Hong Kon the thieves' den known as Kowloon and the island town of Guilin. Ryo can earn money, Suzuki-san says, by getting a part-time job, gambling, or selling off items at a pawn shop *Shenmue II* will hold three different types of dice games, and our hero can also win mon by playing Pachinko and darts, or by facing burly men in arm-wrestling contests.

With an eye towards creating a more exciting experience, *Shenmue II* adds a firstperson fighting mode in addition to its established thirdperson brawling, and a new system has been implemented for QTEs. Instead of pushing a single button or making a solitary tap on the analogue stick at each phase of a QTE challenge, players will be presented with button choices. A new, icon-based Action Key system will enable Ryo to pose specific questions to characters, thus speeding up investigation time.

Suzuki-san is full of fiery optimism about the series, despite the DC's inevitable declin Even after *Shenmue II*, don't expect Ryo to retire: "The story will not end here," says Suzuki-san, "if the market requests it, we will continue with the adventure."

The Thing

Format: **PS2/PC/XBox**
Publisher: **Universal Interactive**
Developer: **Computer Artworks**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q2 2002 (US) TBC (UK)**

Shapeshifting aliens, the Antarctic, scientists: this early '80s horror film has always had the perfect ingredients for a videogame, and Computer Artworks is finally on the case

If you have a penchant for feeling terrified and disturbed, the memory of John Carpenter's classic film, 'The Thing' is likely to excite you. In this Computer Artworks-developed game, recapturing the feelings of uncertainty that the film generated back in 1982 is a top priority.

The claustrophobic story follows a team of scientists isolated in an Antarctic research lab. As the leader of this team, and with little way of identifying who is real and who has been possessed by the identity-assuming alien, you're faced with the task of cleaning up.

"*The Thing* is essentially survival horror," explains Computer Artworks senior producer **Chris Hadley**. "But we've included elements that we think make the game unique."

Although players will be forced to fight off aliens in an Antarctic research lab, this is not a scene-by-scene breakdown of the film; it picks up where the film left off. "Rather than playing out the same events," Hadley says, "players find themselves on a mission to Antarctica following reports of strange occurrences. The story unfolds from there."

Reworking combat conventions

Although the game plays in the thirdperson, the developer has spent a lot of time reworking the genre's tired combat conventions. Players will be able to move and shoot at the same time, rather than having to stand still and take aim before firing.

"Control during combat has been important to us right from the outset," says lead designer **Andrew Curtis**. "We're aiming to have a simple, fluid combat system that makes the game flow much faster than previous examples. How fast a player is moving will affect their accuracy in combat. We're even encouraging the player to feel cocky in parts of the game, so when faced with something they haven't seen before, they're overwhelmed with fear because they don't know how to deal with it."

The most effective weapon at the player's disposal is (as in the film) the flame thrower. Other weapons of choice include grenades, pistols, shotguns and rocket launchers. More important than the selection of weapons, however, is your ability to issue commands to NPCs. This unique focus on teamplay is the game's strongest selling point. For example, if you send an engineer to fix an object, you can also send along a soldier to protect him.

"We feel that NPCs in many games on the market act like drones," Curtis explains. "Ours are different. They each have trust and fear meters. Ideally you have to ensure their trust meters are always high; of course, if they don't trust you as their leader, they're likely to attack you, believing you're the one who is infected." The NPCs have been programmed with three fear levels: Low, High and Crack Up. "At Crack Up point, they lose all sense of rationality, and may start weeping in a corner."

Perhaps the area of most interest to fans of the movie is the manifestation of the Thing itself. "We wanted to have the whole soft-bodied, wet look to the enemies," Curtis says. "We've stayed true to the film in terms of gore and its uniquely grotesque imagery."

To create a game based on a cult horror movie could be viewed as an easy way of cashing in. However, everyone at Computer Artworks is rising to the challenge of delivering an experience that remains faithful to the film, while stretching the survival horror genre. *The Thing* is midway through its two-year production schedule, and shows early implementation of some good ideas.







There's plenty of scope within *The Thing*'s concept for the developer to use more than simple gun-toting action. The picture so far is promising









Much attention has been offered to the visual representation of the alien itself, and considering the malleable nature of its form, the results are proving impressive. Rather than opt for fixed camera work, the game features an indoor chase cam, outdoor open field cam, static cam, look-at-me cam, drama cam and non-interactive cam. All can be cancelled, ensuring the player maintains control over the playing field

Bomberman Generation

Format: GameCub
Publisher: Hudso
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: TB

The familiar explosive gameplay returns, this time on Nintendo's next-gen contender. There's little new to recommend this version over any other, but it remains multiplayer fun









While freedom of movement isn't restricted to straight lines like in the two-dimensional versions, the frenetic explosive dynamic will be familiar to players worldwide

Bomberman has always been a cross-format success story, so it'd be more of a surprise if Hudson decided to shy away from GameCube. The company isn't about to surprise anyone, so franchise fans can breathe easy, and Nintendo obsessives unsatisfied by the GBA incarnation can now await *Bomberman Generation*.

History warns us not to expect much in the way of evolution. *Bomberman*'s move into the 32bit era brought little more than tenplayer action on the Saturn version. The arrival of Dreamcast gave Hudson the opportunity to add online play and a little cel-shaded sparkle, but the structure remained resolutely two dimensional. *Bomberman Generation* owes more to the 3D N64 versions, but keeps the identical action-oriented dynamic: drop bombs, kick bombs, throw bombs. Bang. You're dead.

So, you get the power-ups able to improve your blast radius or the number of bombs you can place; there are the thematic obstacles, most recently seen in *Bomberman Story*, which can be removed by well-placed bombs; and then there's the multiplayer that, as anyone who's ever experienced it will know, is the real reason to buy a *Bomberman* title. Whether that's enough to make anyone pay attention at its upcoming Space World premiere remains to be seen.

Grand Theft Auto 3

Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Rockstar Game
Developer: DM
Origin: U
Release: Q4 200

Inner city mob mayhem returns, this time in glorious 3D. Your would-be wise guy is fresh out of jail and clearly far from reformed, intent on getting to the top the hard way

Undeterred (or perhaps encouraged) by the controversy surrounding its previous *Grand Theft Auto* titles, DMA is finally looking like it's going to deliver with a smooth and manageable 3D representation of the popular franchise. Latest code shows no framerate issues and incredibly fluid gameplay. The main character jumps in and out of appropriated vehicles with some aplomb, and the camera alternates between thirdperson and the driving view with ease.

Gameplay will be instantly familiar to those who have played the previous iterations. After escaping from prison the task is simple: set up as many jobs with gang bosses as possible in order to earn money and increase your reputation. Although the violence is bloody, the comic-book visuals may reduce some of the hysteria no doubt accompanying the game's release.

Mugging pedestrians by pulping them with a baseball bat is just one of the options open to the player. But violence can also be used strategically, with the game offering a drive-by view for easy enemy elimination. With three large city zones, a changeable radio station service and the promise of SWAT teams and police helicopters, *GTA3* is looking tastelessly tasty.









All violence committed in the game has consequences. Mow down pedestrians with your stolen vehicle and your 'wanted' status rises. The greater this becomes the more active the police will become, culminating with SWAT teams and police helicopters on your tail. The narrative unfurls as 'jobs' are accepted, with key moments triggering cut-scenes

Doom

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **id Software, David A Palmer**
Origin: **US**
Release: **TBC**

The game that kick-started the whole FPS furore steadily stalks up on the Game Boy Advance, and looks likely to keep all other pretenders to its handheld crown at bay

Six months ago, when industry pundits were variously preoccupied with bemoaning or delighting in the number of 16bit conversions that are finding their way onto Nintendo's next-generation handheld, few seemed to be turning their thoughts to the onslaught of firstperson shooters that are about to assault the platform. *Ecks Vs Sever*, *BackTrack* and *Dark Arena* will be vying with each other for dominance, but it's going to be a tall order for any of them to eclipse a title that dates back to the gestation of the genre.

Substantially based on the original Jaguar code, the Game Boy Advance incarnation of *Doom* boasts all 24 levels of the original, with eight specific multiplayer maps. Some people will never be pleased, though, and there are already naysayers lamenting the fact that the various add-on packs and sequels have not made the transition to portability.

But the fact is that this is as near perfect a conversion as is possible, boasting the smoothest framerate of all the handheld shooters. Throw in a fourplayer deathmatch, a twoplayer co-operative mode, and the appeal of reliving some of gaming's finer moments, and the title looks assured to sell well and enjoy the subsequent domination of the handheld firstperson shooter scene.









As well as the sheer nostalgia value of reliving the gun-toting mayhem of the original *Doom*, the fact is that the gameplay stands up well today, thanks to a near-perfect conversion based on Carmack's original Jaguar code. Although the oneplayer game could be shortlived for seasoned pros, multiplayer deathmatch and co-operative modes should ensure longevity

Return To Castle Wolfenstein

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Gray Matter Interactive Studios**
Origin: **US**
Release: **TBC**

The first ever fps stretches to a further PC iteration, but the spark seems to have left the game that started it all, and elements of this effort verge on self parody









The underlying game mechanics probably won't be as groundbreaking as the visuals, or indeed those of the original, but so far they seem impressively solid. They will be fleshed out by context-sensitive controls to expand the range of interactivity, and a narrative that unfolds in an atmospherically piecemeal fashion. It's just a shame about the hackneyed occult references

It has been a long time coming, and while there's still no firm release date, it looks unlikely that *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* will redefine the boundaries of gaming in quite the same way as its illustrious predecessor. But it continues to wow onlookers with its blend of photorealistic visuals and solid game mechanics. Essentially a retelling of the original, rather than a true sequel, *Wolfenstein* places the player at the heart of Heinrich Himmler's nefarious occult skullduggery. The reliance on videogame staples – undead hordes and genetic mutation – is unfortunate, but context-sensitive controls that expand the limits of the genre are welcome.

Also welcome is the game's approach towards narrative, which unfolds through overheard snippets of conversation and journals and clipboards that litter the environments. Other smart touches include stamina-sapping sprinting, a sniper rifle that rewards patience with accuracy and, in a bid to eliminate an FPS bugbear, ladders with safety rails around the top.

But the most exciting prospect is a team-based, scenario-centred, multiplayer mode. Details are sketchy, but one possibility is a beachhead assault along the lines of 'Saving Private Ryan', with each player taking on a role either in attack or defence.

Sky Gunner

Format: PlayStation
Publisher: SCE
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: Q3 (Japan) TBC (UK

Sony blasts back onto the shooter scene with a title reminiscent of *Star Fox*, featuring thirdperson firepower aplenty and an encouragingly straightforward targeting system







Combos and special moves make themselves available according to a complex scoring system, illustrated by the wealth of gauges that cover *Sky Gunner*'s screen. The resolutely arcade handling is much easier to grasp



A 3D combat title in the vein of *Star Fox*, *Sky Gunner* signals the return of Sony to the purebred shooter. It's an elegant return, too, or at least that appears to be the intention; witness the Gallic clumsiness of the character names, which, while bringing aural sophistication to Japanese ears, are unlikely to fool the French. A female is called Femme, and a rotund gent is called Ventre.

The thirdperson perspective means a good targeting system is vital, and SCEI's take is simple, using R2 to cycle through potential targets and circle to lock. Orders are issued with the triangle button, but as well as commanding others the player must also pay attention to their own altitude and cabin pressure. Each of the three selectable characters has a special move to help them get out of trouble during combat, and while initially they'll only have access to a cannon, a range of more destructive weapons soon make themselves available.

Arcade-atrophied players will find the Training mode useful, and a Score Attack mode provides immediate simplicity, but it's the Story mode which frames the majority of the action. Cinematic sequences link each level, and important words are highlighted in red, so even inattentive sky jockeys should catch the plot's basics.

Shake It Bravoes!

Format: PlayStation
Publisher: SCI
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: Q3 (Japan) TBC (UK

BeMani goes upmarket as SCEI invites you to become the André Previn of videogamers, conducting pieces by the world's finest classical composers

Those who like the idea of rhythm action but feel cheapened by the idea of a techno version of the Marseillaise or ska A-ha should pay attention. The imminent arrival of conductor sim *Shake It Bravoes!*, including 34 pieces from the world's greatest composers, seems destined to take the BeMani-inspired genre a little more upmarket.

The structure is familiar. Four on-screen circles represent the four pad buttons. A coloured mark moves from one to another, and it's up to the player to press the appropriate button at the right time. Nothing new there, but those hoping for some music game evolution will find it in Sony's determination to use the DualShock 2's analogue potential. The orchestra's volume varies according to the intensity of the button press, giving players an opportunity to provide their own personal interpretation of the work.

Two gauges aid them, one evaluating performance in a similar manner to *Dance Dance Revolution*, and the other showing the force with which the buttons are being pressed. Messages of support keep morale high, and for those players for whom the thrill of conducting just isn't enough, a linking Story mode promises baton action at fashion shows and alien welcome parties.







Musical complexity is promised for advanced conductors, but beginners should find something, too. Crate-conducting might be an inauspicious start for a would-be classical superstar, but it's a touch that's guaranteed to make FPS fans feel at home



MX Rider

Format: **PlayStation2, PC**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Paradigm Entertainment**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

Infogrames attempts to better Nintendo's motocross masterpiece *Excitebike 64* with a PC/PS2 take on the sport, banking on providing a little more in-game variety

Do you want to play the best motocross-based game currently available? Get yourself an N64. In terms of structure, content and play mechanics, little comes close to *Excitebike 64*.

With *MX Rider*, however, Infogrames has what it hopes is a bona fide challenger to the Left Field-developed title. Created by the softco responsible for the delightful *PilotWings 64*, one of *MX Rider*'s current attractions is the ability to engage in the motocross, supercross and freestyle categories of off-road two-wheeled motorsport.

With the backing of the sport's governing body, FIM, all of the 2000 World Championship riders and rounds have made it on to the disc, and the ability to create a rider should allow the player to shape his career by getting involved in bike upgrades and obtaining sponsorship revenue.

Having played PlayStation2 preview code, **Edge** can confirm that, as the game stands, things are still a fair way from their (presumably) desired position, with handling dynamics currently the most obvious problem. In fairness, it does already do a lot of things correctly, but the model would benefit from less rigidity and a little more refinement. It just doesn't feel as intuitive or as subtle as *Excitebike 64*'s, for instance, but it's certainly getting there.









The finished game promises to offer 17 licensed tracks, a comprehensive training mode, six fantasy arenas for Freestyle competitions (already a fun feature, with 30-odd stunts linked together via intuitive button combos) and 27 challenges for you to clear, hence unlocking a further game feature. How the (up to) 12 AI riders react is currently still a mystery

Star Wars Jedi Outcast: Jedi Knight II

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **LucasArts/Activision**
Developer: **Raven Software**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q1 2002**

Following its admission that milking 'Episode I' so hard harmed the company, LucasArts strikes back with some top-notch 'Star Wars' action from Raven Software









Although multiplayer details are still sketchy, the combinatorial combat system of lightsaber and Force powers, as well as the more traditional projectile weaponry such as the wookiee bowcaster, suggest that it's likely to be a dramatic success, while the oneplayer game will surely benefit from the most stunningly lifelike stormtroopers yet seen on any gaming platform

LucasArts' president Simon Jeffery's recent admission that the company had lost its way with the raft of 'Episode I' cash-ins was followed by the statement that to make 'Star Wars' the biggest brand in interactive entertainment the company was lining up partnerships with key developers. Raven Software is one such partner, and is turning its attention to a firstperson shooter that boasts a sterling heritage. All of which suggests that LucasArts is acting on concerns, and has the potential to undergo a renaissance.

The environments and character models that have been demonstrated so far – including the Jedi Academy on Yavin 4, complete with War Room as seen in 'Episode IV' – witness the *Quake III Arena* engine being used with panache to produce the most stunningly realised videogame adaptation of 'Star Wars' yet. Frighteningly fluid lightsaber duels, comic-book gunplay and a multiplayer mode all suggest a return to the form that produced titles such as *Tie Fighter* and the original *Dark Forces*.

Currently *Star Wars Jedi Outcast: Jedi Knight II* is only slated for a PC release, but given the poor quality suggested by footage of the console-specific *Obi Wan*, it's surely only a matter of time before it's scheduled for other platforms.





TimeSplitters2

Monkeys, iLink and an all-new oneplayer mode are just some of the changes Free Radical Design has made in the follow-up to its debut title. Edge finds out what the codeshop can do freed from the constraints of the PS2 launch

The biggest similarity between the two games is the name," says **Karl Hilton**, FRD's head of art, in an attempt to articulate the differences between *TimeSplitters* and its forthcoming sequel.

"I think as a general rule you could say we've beefed everything up. The characters have been beefed up, the backgrounds are beefed up, the animation is even more solid than it was and goes into more detail than before, and the special effects are richer now," he continues. "We just had time to go back and really look at everything we did the first time around and just really refine it and push it."

Edge has heard similar claims before, of course. Regrettably, they often prove to be wildly exaggerated, but in Free Radical Design's case **Edge** is quite happy to sit in the company's board room and let six of the core team members wax lyrical about their latest project. After all, this is the same group of individuals that, within 18 months of setting up their own development studio, delivered an impressively playable firstperson shooter – on time – to coincide with the US and European PS2 launches. If the team was hurried first time around, imagine what it might have achieved with a little more time on its hands...





Before you mention it, the screens in this feature show few different levels at the request of the developer, who is keen to control its media output

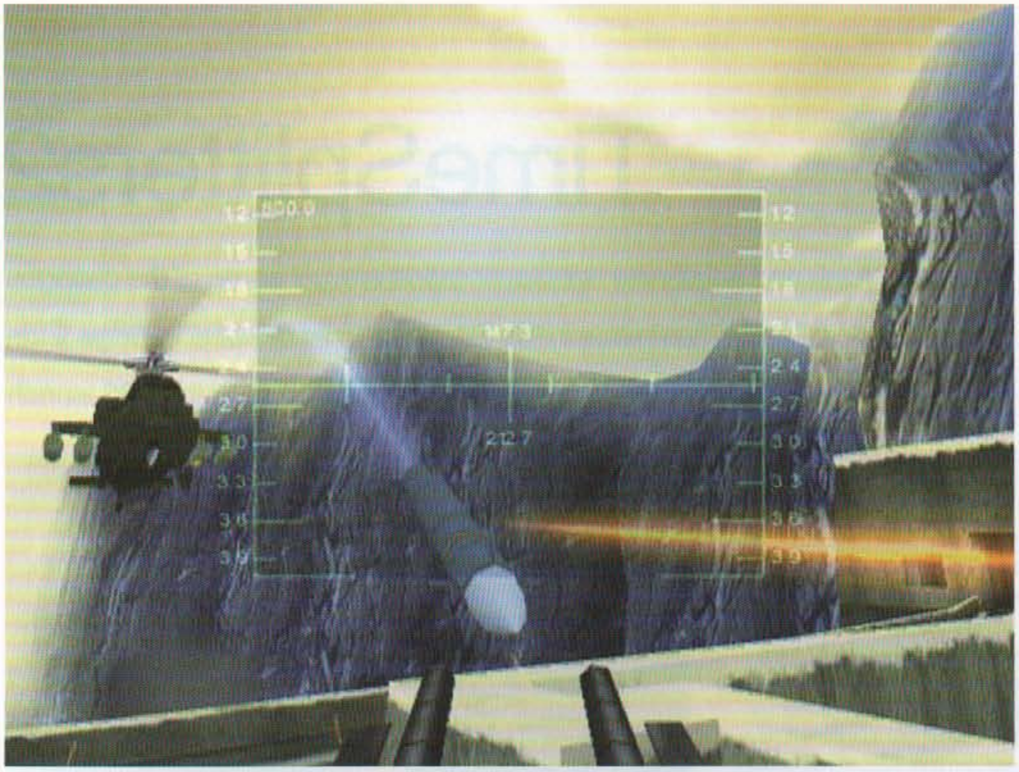


Follow-up fine tuning

Steve Ellis, head of software, underlines the changes in place for the sequel: "Technically, it's throwing about a lot more polygons than it ever was before, just because of more time we've had to be spent on that side – it's more than doubled so far, and it's still got some way to go."

Format: **PS2**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Free Radical Design**
Release: **March 2002**
Origin: **UK**

Photography: **Martin Thompson**



At certain stages throughout the game a boss encounter awaits. This particular instance takes place at the top of the dam seen in the background of the Siberian level and pits you against a Gunship. To make matters a little more balanced, you can take control of the unmanned anti-aircraft gun







Amusingly, the team has included plenty of 'homages' to *GoldenEye* which should hopefully silence certain members of the *TimeSplitters* critics group. On a more important note, the levels are far more elaborate than FRD's first game, both in terms of geometry and physical dimension

"Needless to say, as a first-generation title – although we pushed it as hard as we could at the time – it wasn't doing an awful lot compared to what the capabilities of the machine are," adds Hilton.

"I think the one thing we did, which was quite naïve, was to say, 'We're trying to get a game out for launch,' and that sets certain limits on ambition," **Dave Doak**, head of design, says with the benefit of hindsight. "And it's just very strange that you can do that and people say, 'Oh, was it rushed?' and I'd say, 'Well, any game I've ever, ever seen anyone make has been rushed, at the end.' But it wasn't rushed, because it was planned, and it worked within the time limit. If it had been rushed, it probably wouldn't have got done. And it was done under extreme pressure."

You're right to detect a certain sense of defensiveness from the team. From the outset of the *TimeSplitters* project, the developer maintained an openness in its relationship with the press that few others have the courage to match. *TimeSplitters* would not be a oneplayer-focused experience, the start-up disclosed, and the emphasis would instead be placed on the game's arcade multiplayer aspects. There were no silly technological claims made. On top of this, temporal restrictions were consistently acknowledged as a major design determining factor.

"This time we've had a lot more time to go back and look at the games that we've admired in the past and stuff that we like to play, and get more of those things in"

However, few critics of the game appeared to remember these points when condemning *TimeSplitters* for not providing a oneplayer mission-based mode duplicating *GoldenEye*, a game that only a small percentage of Free Radical Design's staff had previously worked on. Which, other than highlighting some absurd reasoning, completely dismissed the fact that early PS2 adopters had the opportunity to pick up an FPS that delivered play dynamics to easily rival *Quake III* for those prepared to put in the effort. (Thankfully, the dedicated European gaming market drew its own conclusions, and *TimeSplitters* performed remarkably well at retail – at least, for a game that failed to receive the marketing push it deserved.)

Getting over *GoldenEye*

"It was annoying to have people saying things like, 'Oh, it's not like *GoldenEye*'," concedes Doak, clearly still irritated. "Well, it wasn't like *GoldenEye*. It wasn't intended to be like *GoldenEye*. We didn't forget how to do it, we were just doing something slightly different."

For *TimeSplitters2*, the team is again doing something slightly different. The developer has collated the feedback from various Web sites, and since finishing its first game has been busy working on something with which to silence the critics. In short, you could say it's aiming to better *GoldenEye*.

Certain elements remain the same, however – you're still an agent battling against the evil TimeSplitters race across a variety of time zones, this time ranging from the Old West to a cyberpunk future. There is still an Arcade (multiplayer) option and a map editor (see box), but also a potentially superb iLink capability (see box) and a radically enhanced Story mode, with comprehensive mission scenarios.

To convincingly demonstrate the latter, Doak leads **Edge** to the television monitor by his desk where he proceeds to load up the first level from the PS2 ToolStation. The screen is soon displaying a Siberian military base, complete with a massive dam as the backdrop – one of several cheeky references to *GoldenEye*. Immediately, the visual improvement Ellis previously boasted of is evident. The environment is far more complex than anything seen in *TimeSplitters*, with a far more adventurous use of textures. But it's the enhancement in the characters that perhaps impresses the most – not only are they substantially more detailed in terms of geometry, but their animation routines have been markedly improved.

Having sneaked up on the snow-covered compound, Doak makes his move: two or three swift presses of the shoulder button and his silenced handgun has successfully eliminated an enemy (conveniently illustrating the more diverse – and hence far more gratifying – hit animations than those of the original game), but not before a surveillance camera spots the incident. Within seconds, every armed Siberian in the compound has been alerted. Their movement is more organic than **Edge** has seen in an FPS before, the hand-animated routines really lending an air of genuine character to the intricate polygonal figures. They shuffle and alter their direction while maximising their firing opportunities –

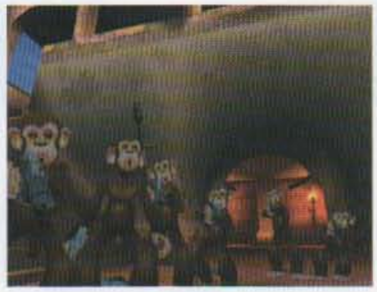



Hasit Zala
lead programmer
James Cunliffe
lead animator
Karl Hilton
head of art
Graeme Norgate
music and sound design
David Doak
head of design
Steve Ellis
head of software

Level headed

Suitably pleased with the accessibility and flexibility of its previous MapMaker level editor, the team is keen to again include this excellent feature. This time around, rather than just offer you the opportunity to create deathmatch style scenarios, there is now an option to set up Story levels – you can place NPCs and assign functionality. So, for instance, if you want to create a patrol route, you can. You can even determine whether a particular character will undergo a diversion in his/her/its beat, or just carry on travelling from one patrol point to point. You can also include doors and keycards (as in the main game). For the graphics whores amongst you, the cosmetic options have not been ignored; lighting is now used more subtly and offers a more comprehensive set of parameters (lights can be made to flicker and have enhanced colour variation etc). The potential to create impressively complex missions to be shared with fellow *TS2* players forms another exciting facet of the game.







Characters are a lot more detailed second time around and a lot more diverse, too, with greater height differentiation between them (below). Free Radical claims the majority of current FPSs are rather unimaginative and suffer from overly generic settings









Explosions are now pleasingly more extravagant - both visually and aurally (it's a similar story with the weapons). Although wound animations benefit from far more variety as well as taking into account the effect of the particular weapon used to inflict the damage, there is still no blood

their fighting ability no longer restrained by animation constraints, they react in a more human manner (they're now capable of shooting while strafing, for instance). It's a persuasive sight, certainly more so than the majority of CPU opposition you will have previously gone up against.

They also appear far more intelligent, which is largely the result of a complete reworking of the AI routines. "Well, the Story stuff was very shallow last time, and hopefully it won't be this time," says **Hasit Zala**, lead programmer. "You've got communication, you've got sound activation, and you've got sight activation, and short of smell..." His voice trails off, but not before he cracks a smile. And then he's serious again: "As an example, we have got a lot more stealth stuff in there, and it's also heavily based around animations. There'll be a patrol route, and they'll have field of view which they can see – but it's obviously based on where their head is looking."

"It gets to a point where you get to know the animation – you get to read the first ten frames and you'll know what animation it is so you can hide round the corner. You'll see him and you'll panic, and then you think, 'Oh, it's that animation.' Then you can back up and you know where he's going to go, and then off he goes," enthuses lead animator **James Cunliffe**, who has worked very closely with the AI to ensure *TimeSplitters2*'s baddies come across as realistic as possible. "And the nice thing about that is that all of the patrol routes that they go on last for different amounts of time, so the longer you wait, the whole game changes."

Zala elaborates: "You'll recognise patterns, obviously, but within that it will play differently, so it won't be like *TimeSplitters* where it's sort of like 'at that point, this is going to happen, at that point... [and so on]'. There will obviously be stuff like that by the very nature of doing a linear storyline, but it won't be so black and white."

Naturally, the team is keen to exploit other advantages brought about by improvements in artificial intelligence. Currently, the first of the story levels are being set up and the intention is to include more AI-driven objectives (i.e. actually observing or interacting with AI characters) to form part of the later missions. These work alongside the more traditional point-to-point tasks.

But back to Siberia. Having survived the onslaught of enemy bullets (which leave a neat trail as they whizz past) partly thanks to the wonders of God mode, Doak has made his way inside an underground complex and is having trouble persuading a soldier to stop using a crate as cover and come out into the open for some gunplay. Eventually, a well-placed grenade illustrates the futility of the adversary's resistance (as well as the increased intensity of the explosions in *TimeSplitters2*).

There's also something very





Additions such as end of level bosses are just one aspect of the much-improved oneplayer *TS2* experience. Expect plenty more variety amidst the game's objective and mission-based action



attractive about the way the game is presented. Free Radical Design has taken an extremely stylised approach – more so than the already distinct *TimeSplitters* – and a very arcade-like feel extends from environments, protagonists, and even the actual choice of font for the on-screen text. As Doak skips from one level to the next everything appears to fit coherently, regardless of the obvious disparity of the various time zones.

"One of our concerns when we started doing *TimeSplitters2* was that the subject matter is just so diverse. The continuity between the backgrounds and the characters probably fell down slightly last time," admits Cunliffe. "But this feels solid now – it feels like a solid real world, it feels like it exists outside of what you see."

"The backgrounds and the characters sit really, really well together," adds Hilton. "The art team had more time to sit down and work it out and we got more interesting backgrounds and we controlled it much more tightly this time – they're bigger, they're more expansive and they just look at lot nicer with the work the programmers have done in refining the engine."



(From left) Doak, Hilton and Ellis : the three directors of FRD are determined to create a single player game that takes the *GoldenEye* formula to the next evolutionary level

The luxury of time

Part of this process is the result of having a more generous development cycle second time around. For *TimeSplitters*, levels were being set up alongside the building of the engine. As a result new features being inserted in the game would invalidate level set-up, and the amount of refinement needed was never done. Another factor is the recent arrival of Sony's Performance Analyzer, which the team has already had the opportunity to use.

"It sort of confirmed a lot of suspicions – there are a lot of things to look at," Ellis divulges. "Obviously it's the second and third time that you do it that it's more interesting, because you can try and fix the things that you find out about it. We're going to tighten it. Next time should be more interesting.

"One thing that we've always said [is that] the biggest problem with the PS2 is the CPU. And that's something we're really focusing on now. It's a bit strange, actually. We've never had much of a problem with the amount of polygons that we're trying to draw – that always comfortably fits in. The thing that makes it drop frames occasionally has always been the CPU, so we're looking at ways of speeding that up now. That's something the Performance Analyzer can help with."

As the team is asked to attend the photo shoot, it's time to play a new level. This time it's a courtyard from the type of quiet Mexican village where you'd find a couple of gringos hiding from a tenacious Texan sheriff. There's a church – with a bell, of course – but rather than cowboys on the run, the courtyard is filled with monkeys. Monkeys with guns. Conveniently, they're all facing away from you, but as soon as the first of their kin goes down they're on to the threat in a second. What happens next is a blur; a score of simians are strafing, cartwheeling and back flipping their way around the screen, firing wildly along to a musical score redolent of Ennio Morricone on chemicals. It's madness, but it's also soon over. Apes 1, **Edge** 0. A second attempt only further unbalances matters. A third attempt crashes the game, which offers a timely opportunity to chat about the game's soundtrack, which has so far appeared to match the action admirably.

"With *TimeSplitters*, the sound was fairly near the back of the queue and things kept pushing in," says **Graeme Norgate**, responsible for the music and sound design. "It still is at the moment, but there's lots of ideas this time that I'm getting round to – interaction between your enemies and stuff. Certainly you feel as though you're a bit more engrossed in what's happening, and I've tried to set more of an atmosphere per level. We had a fair amount of ambient sounds for *TimeSplitters* which all got ripped out at the end because of problems, and simple things like multichannel sound that didn't quite make it. I wasn't totally disappointed with the way it turned out but I knew that it could have been improved."

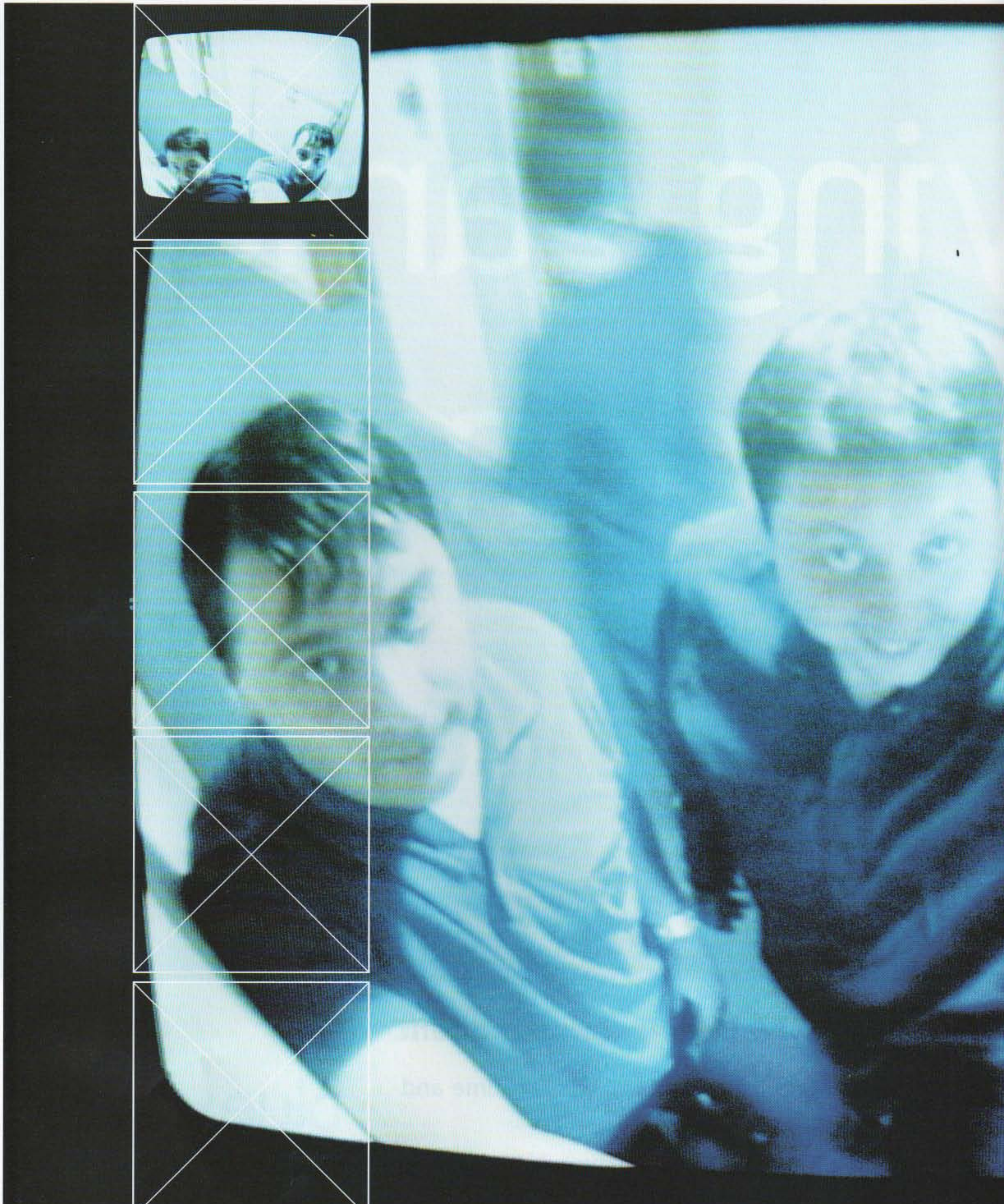
Like Free Radical Design's first project, time has run out on **Edge**'s visit. However, from all that the developer has revealed, it looks likely that *TimeSplitters2* should emerge as a significant improvement over its predecessor, establishing itself as essential videogaming material in the process. But, as if to make sure, Hilton reinforces this with a parting message: "This time we've had a lot more time to go back and look at the games that we've admired in the past and stuff that we like to play, and get more of those things in. We've still got lots and lots of ideas – it wasn't that we didn't have ideas for the first one, it was just that we didn't have the time."

iLink, iCandy

One of the game's most significant new additions is the introduction of iLink connectivity. Edge witnessed a threeplayer deathmatch in action and can report that everything works exactly as you'd expect it to (the team has also tested an eightplayer set-up, and 16 is theoretically possible). But perhaps more appealing than the thrill of gunning down fellow players within the privacy of your own screen, is the opportunity to team up against the evil that the CPU can throw your way. Due to processing costs, co-operative Story mode will only let you play in pairs but anyone that experienced, say, *Perfect Dark*'s splitscreen equivalent will know how much of a positive impact this feature can have on a game's dynamic.



TS2 does not feature online play as the developer isn't convinced such a feature would be supported by the time the game is released. Fans of multiplayer can however take comfort in the iLink options FRD is implementing and which should make up for any potential disappointment (see above)





Photography: **Martin Thompson**

Inside…

Crawfish

Well prepared for the arrival of Game Boy Advance, the Croydon-based handheld developer now finds itself on the brink of big rewards. Edge finds out how the company is making a success of small, and learns about some of the problems associated with 32bit development the second time around

The last time **Edge** visited Crawfish Interactive, the PlayStation2 was on the cover, Dreamcast had just launched in the UK, the GameCube was still the Dolphin, and the Xbox was a twinkle in Microsoft's eye.

All the next-generation riches in the world weren't distracting Crawfish from its calling, though. Judged by any standards, the company's mission to bring a seemingly unending roster of titles to the ageing Game Boy Color was one that met with incredible success both commercially and critically. One of the consequences of developing titles for an unglamorous and increasingly creaky 10-year-old handheld console is that Crawfish has, to date, been consigned to a level of relative anonymity and low exposure that belies the company's achievements.

But having quietly and steadily built up a track record and a reputation for getting quality handheld conversions done in timely fashion, the company is now ready to step into the limelight. Thanks to the enormous retail success, and the astonishing levels of interest generated by the launch of Nintendo's Game Boy Advance, it's unlikely that Crawfish will remain a well-kept secret for much longer.

The right place at the right time

"We're very lucky to be in the right position at the right time, with Nintendo bringing out this console that everyone's going crazy over," states company founder **Cameron Sheppard**, modestly overlooking the years of hard grind that have established such a strong position. "Right now publishers are coming on board with GBA," agrees development director **Mike Merren**. "It'll depend on their first couple of titles and how well they sell whether they stick with it, but luckily things like *Tony Hawk's* have done well, which means that people are going to think





Cameron Sheppard
founder and managing director



Mike Merren
development director







Building on the experience of adapting *Street Fighter Alpha 2* to Game Boy Color, the conversion of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* is looking likely to be another killer app in the Game Boy Advance's growing armoury

FAQ

Company name: Crawfish Interactive
Founded: 1997
HQ: Croydon
Number of employees: 45
Selected softography: GBC – *Driver*; *Rainbow Six*; *Street Fighter Alpha 2*; *X-Men Mutant Academy*; *WWF Attitude*; *WWF Warzone*; *Space Invaders*; *Roswell Conspiracies*; *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing*; *Razor Scooter*; *Godzilla: Monster Wars*; *Aliens: Thanatos Encounter*; *Aladdin*; *Bust-A-Move 2*; *Bust-A-Move 3 DX*; *Bust-A-Move 4*; *Cruis'n Exotica*; *ECW Hardcore Revolution*; *Godzilla: The Series*; *Lego Island 2*; *The Adventures Of Mary Kate & Ashley*; *Mary Kate & Ashley: Get a Clue*; *Maya the Bee*; *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing (Round 2)* (GBA); *Spin Cycle* (iTV)
Projects in development: *Ecks Vs Sever*; *Street Fighter Alpha 3*; *Speedball II: Brutal Deluxe*; *Robot Wars*; *Driven*; *Razor Freestyle Scooter*; *Wings*; two unannounced projects (all GBA)

that they can make something out of it that's not just Japanese. There are a lot more publishers on GBA than Game Boy Color. You always found in the UK charts you had Nintendo, Ubi Soft and THQ, and that was pretty much it. I think the GBA charts will be very much different."

Nevertheless, it took a while for publishers to sit up and take notice of the consumer furore that was kicking up around the launch of the GBA. "There was a bit of a delay late last year because of Nintendo delaying the cost of goods," explains Sheppard. "Which meant that publishers didn't know how much they should be paying for projects, so there was a bit of a time when we were in limbo. But it worked in our favour because that's when we put resources into R&D." And, as any astute observer of the videogame scene will realise, the fruits of those resources are currently being distilled into three of the many titles that are in progress at the company's Croydon HQ.

The first of these, *Ecks Vs Sever*, which will be published by Bam Entertainment, is indicative of the somewhat unexpected firstperson shooter trend that has hit the GBA. Although it's up against some fairly stiff opposition in the shape of *Doom*, the game has a number of unique selling points. A healthy complement of multiplayer modes is rounded out by an Assassination mode, which includes a sniper zoom that belies the relative simplicity of the platform. And having trounced Merren (or, more precisely, having beaten him by a solitary frag), **Edge** can attest to the smooth framerates of the current build.

Another Bam title on display is *Driven*, which was spun out of a 3D racing engine developed by Crawfish's R&D team. Having secured the publishing deal, though, the company went back to the drawing board to produce an isometric driving game that also benefits from multiplayer competition.

Although the third title to come out of R&D, a conversion of Cinemaware's *Wings*, wasn't on show when **Edge** came to visit, it's a title that's typical of the way back catalogues are being turned into potential revenue streams thanks to Nintendo's 32bit architecture. With Crawfish having recently signed an agreement with the Bitmap Brothers, there will be several other classic titles joining *Wings*, the first of

"Publishers are coming on board with GBA. It'll depend on their first couple of titles and how well they sell whether they stick with it"





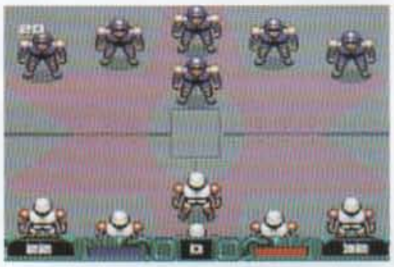


Some of the titles underway at Crawfish's Croydon HQ include (from top) *Razor Freestyle Scooter*, *Driven* and *Wings*. The latter two started life as research and development projects when things were quiet on the Game Boy Advance, owing to publisher uncertainty













Ecks Vs Sever **(top three) and** ***Speedball II: Brutal Deluxe*** **(bottom three), are two of the more anticipated titles underway. The former was spun out of R&D, while the latter uses Mega Drive and Amiga code**

which will be *Speedball II: Brutal Deluxe*, based on the Bitmaps' original Mega Drive and Amiga code. It's already very playable, and looks likely to banish any lingering memories of the PlayStation update. Significantly, it's not going to be paraded in front of publishers until the game is complete, allowing the developer a greater level of creative freedom than might otherwise be the case.

Creative Crawfish

But Crawfish isn't just an archivist of 16bit gaming memories. The company's performance on the Game Boy Color has established it in the minds of prominent publishers. "It's surprising walking around trade shows how many quite well known people in the industry recognise us and know us," observes Sheppard. "When we went to France for a WAP conference there were a lot of PDA companies who wanted to speak to us because they'd heard of Crawfish. So that goes a long way – and publishers do talk to each other, which is how the Capcom thing happened." Indeed. So happy were the folks at Capcom with Crawfish's GBC conversion of *Street Fighter Alpha 2* that the publisher has commissioned a sequel on the GBA. And *Street Fighter Alpha 3* is already looking very impressive. Identical to the Dreamcast version, but with three additional characters, it's looking like a flawless conversion, even at this early stage.

It's clear from the rich variety of titles that Crawfish has to show, which include *Razor Freestyle Scooter* and a game based on the massively popular 'Robot Wars' series, that the Game Boy Advance has several advantages as a development platform. The first is that it no longer requires developers to master an idiosyncratic version of Z80. "Programming-wise obviously it's all written in C," notes Sheppard. "You can go to assembler, which is a lot more complicated than the Z80, and there are a few programs that are probably more suited to assembler than C, but for all our projects there are so many more advantages on the GBA compared to the GBC."

One of these is the quick turnaround times that ensure a steady flow of projects through Crawfish's doors. "The great thing for our programmers," argues Merren, "is that because it's in C you can get stuff up and running so much quicker, so you can go through and get demos done. From that point of view we can prove the publisher's concepts really quickly, whereas before you almost had to finish your game before you could preview it on GBC."

What these quick turnaround times mean in practice is that Crawfish employees really can make a pretty big difference. "With the bigger platforms they're just cogs of the wheel," explains Sheppard. "When it comes out they can say, 'Oh, I did that character,' but here even the artists are involved with the whole of the game." As, indeed, are development assistants, it would seem: "We don't have testers, we have what we call development assistants, and they basically do QA testing, mapping, design. They're game fanatics. Big Dave is completely mad about *Street Fighter Alpha*, and there's no way he will let us release that product unless it's perfect. And he's mad about 'Robot Wars' as well." Perhaps significantly, the room housing the company's development assistants is the first thing you see when you come through the door at Crawfish.

Development difficulties

Of course, developing for Nintendo's handheld isn't entirely without its problems. For almost every publisher or developer eager to jump on the GBA bandwagon, there is another that has ruled Advance development out owing to the low margins offered by Nintendo's cartridge pricing scheme. Both Sheppard and Merren are reluctant to bite the hand that feeds them, but they do agree that ROM pricing affects Crawfish as much as it does anyone. Principally this is because the cost to publishers affects their decision as to whether to support the platform. "The bottom line is that it makes it a lot harder for publishers to go forward and say that they want to do Game Boy Advance titles, that's the biggest impact," agrees Merren. But there are other ways that the pricing structure affects developers. "For us," he continues, "we might get squeezed on the amount of cartridge space that we can use, and the possibility of battery back-up. I think it was *GT Advance* that had battery back-up in Japan, and got completely slated for taking it out in Europe and America because of cost saving."

Indeed, for all its 32bit power, the Game Boy Advance is still fundamentally limited hardware. With Nintendo keen to promote the multiplayer link-up potential of its 'gaming anywhere' machine, the first wave of software made a point of supporting single-cartridge multiplayer gaming. "From the point of view of all the games that are coming out at the moment you can see that single-cartridge multiplayer's pretty important," says Sheppard. "There aren't many titles that don't have multiplayer aspects, so it's

"It's surprising how many quite well known people in the industry recognise us and know us. That goes a long way"



obviously an important area for Nintendo and other publishers."

Given the constraints of the format, though, and the added pressure brought about by low margins, it's unlikely that single-cartridge support will be a feature that survives for the duration of the GBA's lifespan. "Personally I think it will become more and more difficult as people are trying to make better and better games on the system," claims Merren. "At the end of the day you've got to try and get the game into 256K of memory. For *Driven* we've had to include almost another, cut-down version of the game sitting in there. So it just depends how many developers have got the ability to cut down their games, and as games get more complex, it's going to be more difficult to cut them down."

Increased competition

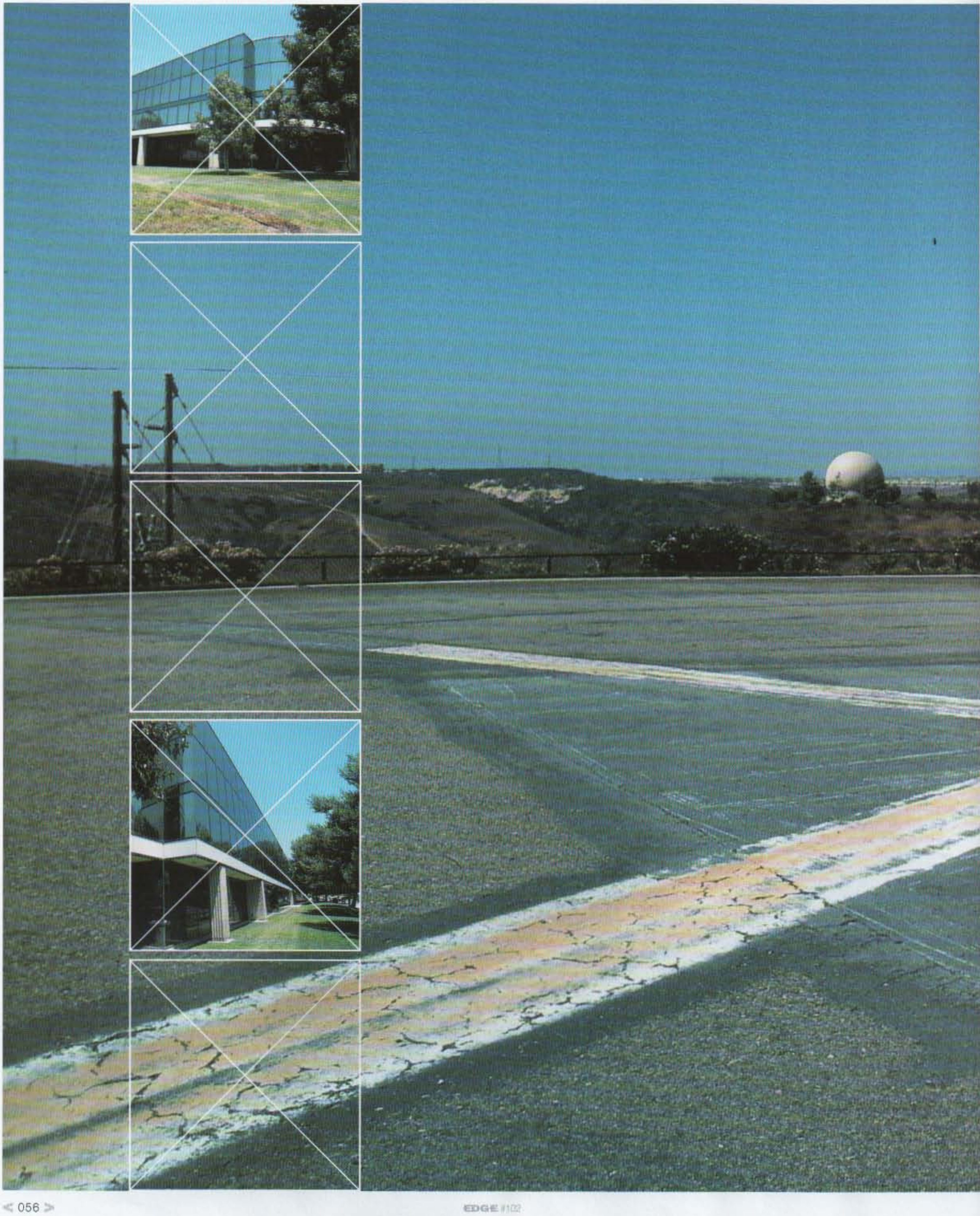
Another challenge facing Crawfish, though one that the company seems well placed to resist, is the number of rivals developing for the company's chosen platform. "If you look at it from a competitive standpoint, there's no one competing with us in terms of amount of products. It's probably only publishers who've got as many GBA titles as we have," points out Merren. "But then you've got people like Graphic State that are obviously doing another firstperson shooter, you've got Pukka Games, Virtua Craft. There are probably about 120 Game Boy titles coming out, which probably means that we've got nearly 100 competitors."

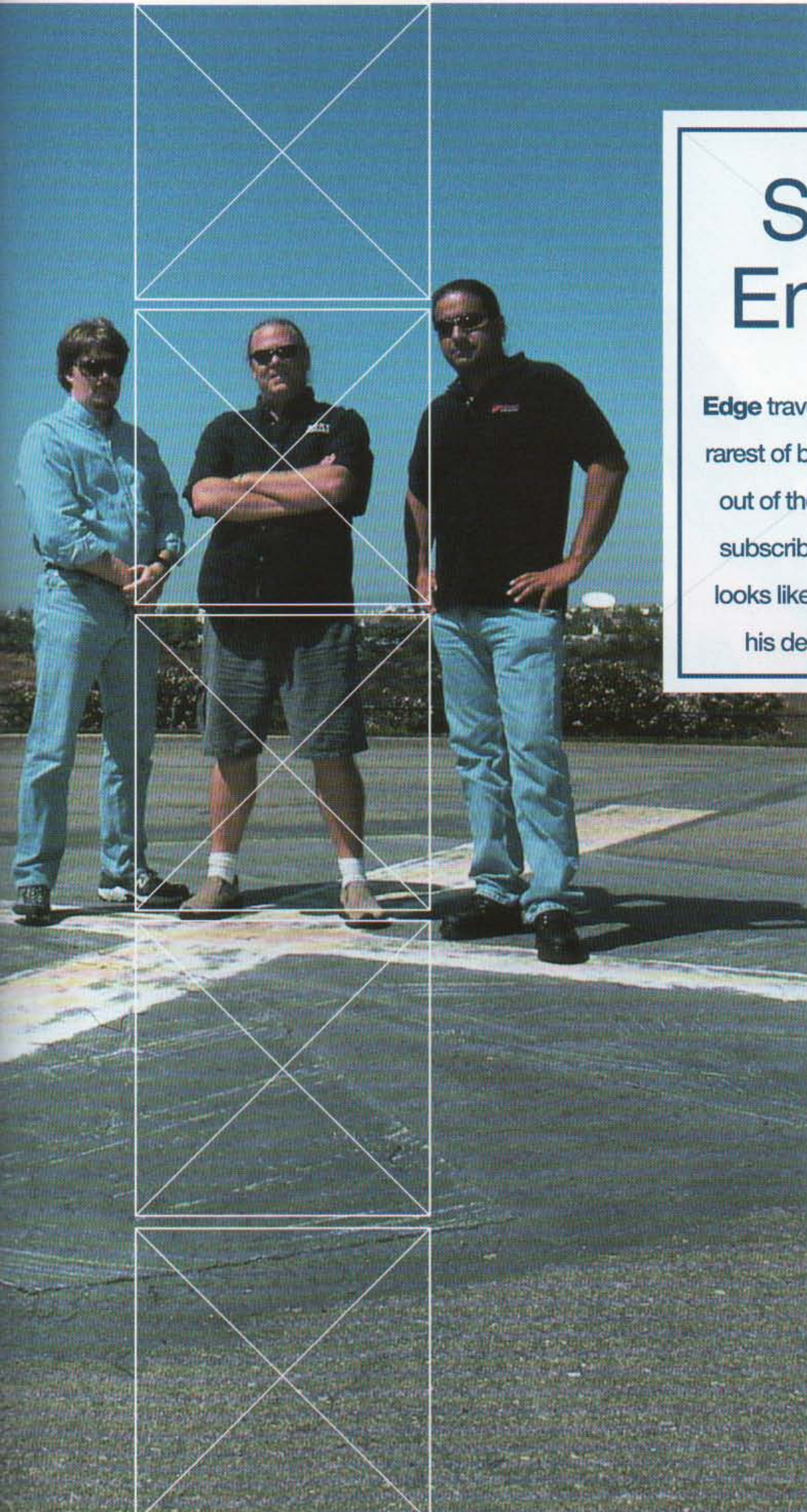
Which means, in essence, that Crawfish faces fairly stiff competition. So the most immediate challenge is continually sourcing the number of titles that the company is accustomed to developing. "There are three methods of doing that," explains Merren. "There's where the publisher comes to us with a licence, and asks us to put a proposal together. You've then got us coming up with our own ideas, which we've done a couple of times. We take them to a certain stage and then show it to people. And then, as in the case with the Bitmap Brothers and Cinemaware, we look around at what's been really good in the past and could work on the GBA, and take that to publishers when we've completed it. And these are the approaches that we're going to continue to use. I believe we have kept good relationships with publishers, so hopefully there'll be more to come from them anyway."

In any case, Crawfish is beginning to move away from single-platform development now that the revenue opportunities created by interactive TV and mobile communications are a bit more clear cut. "Our main focus for the next three years is going to be the Game Boy Advance, with increasing attention on WAP, or next-generation 3G and PDAs," explains Merren. "Obviously the networked entertainment front is a bit of a new frontier for us, and it's changing all the time," continues Sheppard. "But because we are focused strongly on one platform, we are at the mercy of that market, and while I don't reckon we're in any immediate danger, it's nice that we've diversified a bit."

Having persevered when the handheld sector was almost terminally unfashionable, it somehow seems just that Crawfish should now be set to take advantage of the renewed opportunity provided by the Game Boy Advance and handheld diversification. With an Australian office in the process of being set up, it certainly seems like the company is well positioned to take advantage of future opportunities.







Photography: **Darrel Favrhow**

Inside…

Sony Online Entertainment

Edge travels to South California to meet up with that rarest of breeds: a company actually making money out of the Internet. And how. With 400,000 paying subscribers and a slew of new titles on the way, it looks like there's no stopping CEO Kelly Flock and his devoted team of MMO game developers

"We just like online games," bellows **Kelly Flock**, Sony Online Entertainment's bombastic CEO. "If you want a mission statement, that is it."

It is a curt introduction to the online empire he has helped build since Sony bought out Verant last year. Though the thought of generating a host of persistent online games may be fraught with difficulties – not to mention costly overheads – the Flock strategy is disarmingly simple: "We are developing massively multiplayer games in as wide a variety of genres as possible. We look at current PC games and decide if we can bring anything in from the singleplayer experience into a massively multiplayer world. We did an RPG with *EverQuest*, and we're doing a realtime strategy now with *Sovereign*. We are working on a firstperson shooter and *Star Wars Galaxies*. We prefer this to just saying, 'Okay it's only going to be RPGs and sequels to *EverQuest*, and let's do four more themed RPGs.' What's happened over the last 10-12 years is that gaming genres have been pretty well defined. There hasn't been much new, and every iteration of hardware technology has just given them a graphical edge."

SOE's operation in the heart of San Diego's medical research belt has expanded massively over the last five years. So much, in fact, that the local authority has felt obliged to lay down copious quantities of fibre-optic cable just to meet the demand of the company's servers. Though only a handful of coders developed *EverQuest* – which is currently the world's most popular MMORPG, boasting 400,000 subscribers – it takes considerably more staff to keep consumers happy. Build a persistent world and you must suffer persistent costs. A 100-strong team man the customer services terminals –



FAQ

Company name: Sony Online Entertainment
Founded: 1995
HQ: San Diego, California
Number of employees: 480
Selected softography: *EverQuest* (PC); *Tanarus* (PC); *Empyrean* (PC); *Chain Reaction* (PC); *Saint-Tropez* (PC)
Projects in development: *PlanetSide* (PC); *Cosmic Rift* (PC); *Infantry* (PC); *EverQuest: Shadows Of Luclin* (PC); *Sovereign* (PC); *Star Wars Galaxies* (PC)



Scott McDaniel
vice president of marketing

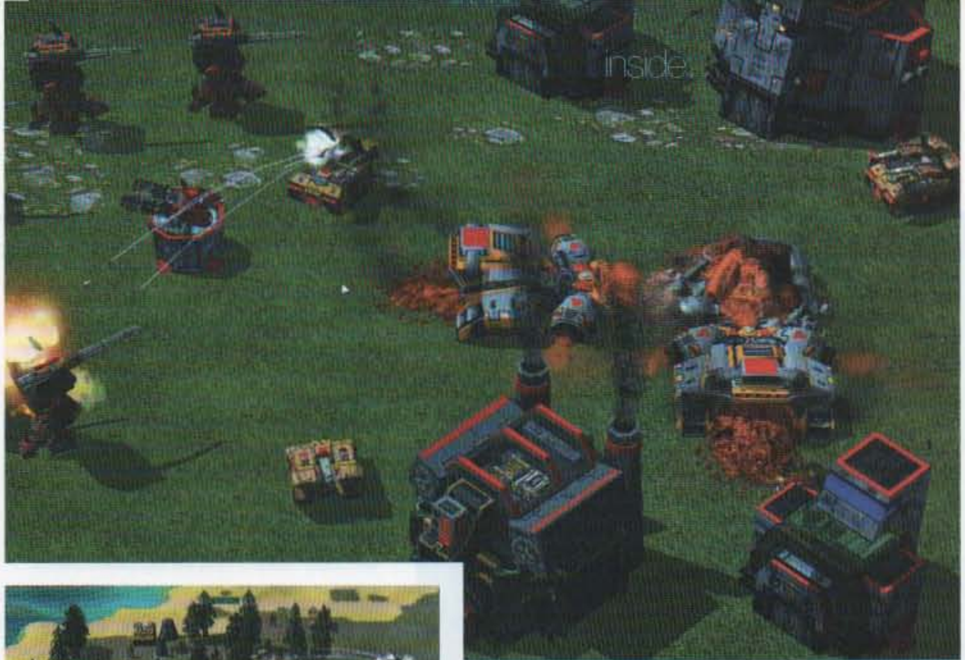


Rob Hill
r, *Infantry* and *Cosmic Rift*

From back left, clockwise:
Jeff Butler
producer, *EverQuest*
Scott McDaniel
lead artist, *EverQuest*
Steve George
producer, *PlanetSide*



Kelly Flock
CEO, Sony Online Entertainment









Along with the MMORPG and the MMOFPS comes SOE's ambitious MMORTS, *Sovereign*. Abbreviations aside, the first comprehensive online RTS title has impressively vast landscapes and many unit types

inspired, no doubt, by the banner which heads their office: 'Kill our customers with kindness'.

"In the long term it's not as extraordinarily profitable as people might imagine," continues Flock. "You have to put so much money back into it. We are still looking at it as if we are building the business. Gross margin probably is around about 50 per cent. But we are investing in the future. Every nickel we make from *EverQuest* we claw back in and add a nickel of our own right now. The business is still building."

Securing online dominance

SOE remains positive about conquering all the available online space. But expansive 3D worlds with their healing clans and fear raid cliques do not appeal to everyone. As a countermeasure SOE develops games with all users and skill bases taken into consideration. Flock broadly separates SOE's titles into three categories: casual games, intermediate games and premium games. While *EverQuest* and the forthcoming *Star Wars Galaxies* grab the headlines, a number of Flock's employees are busily developing a raft of 'lunch break' titles. A selection of such games including *Chain Letters*, *The Online Dating Game* and *Pharaoh's Secret* can be found at www.station.sony.com. More interesting, though, are *Cosmic Rift* and *Infantry*. Though both games are strictly 2D affairs they offer instantly gratifying gameplay in arenas with up to 100 players. Though Flock refers to them as 'intermediate', it's clear that the small team developing the titles is proud of its work.

"The response has been amazing," enthuses **Rob Hill**, producer and designer of *Cosmic Rift* and *Infantry*. "It's the adaptability of these games which gives us so much scope for presenting fun experiences. *Infantry* supports many different styles of games, including capture the flag and what we call grab ball." The latter works on typical football principles, with teams vying to score goals by manoeuvring their hoverbikes across deviously designed pitches. "Through map editors and design tools we can make different styles of games quickly," continues Hill. "We did the graphics for the entire zones in a couple of weeks, and can implement the rules very quickly. It's still in beta test, but players are already forming leagues. We even have people logging on just to run commentary."

Though *Cosmic Rift* and *Infantry* are available to download free, it is SOE's premium games which has US gamers, and to a lesser extent, European gamers, in thralls of expectation. JuJu sticks (don't ask) and gifts from *EverQuest* fans line the SOE offices. They are just a small indication of the devotion the game has generated. But the battle to win a substantial portion of the online consumer market has been hard fought. While new upstarts *Anarchy Online* and *Tribes 2* offer future competition to SOE's most popular franchise, it is *Ultima Online* which is still its biggest rival. "We saw a gap in the market," explains SOE's vice president of marketing, **Scott McDaniel**. "At first we had huge debates about how we could compete with *Ultima Online* and we toyed with the same player versus player dynamic. We went live with player versus player and cooperative servers. The traffic was 80-90 per cent cooperative. The prevailing thought process at the time, led by games like *Quake* and *Unreal* was that everyone wants to kill each other, but that was just what was available."

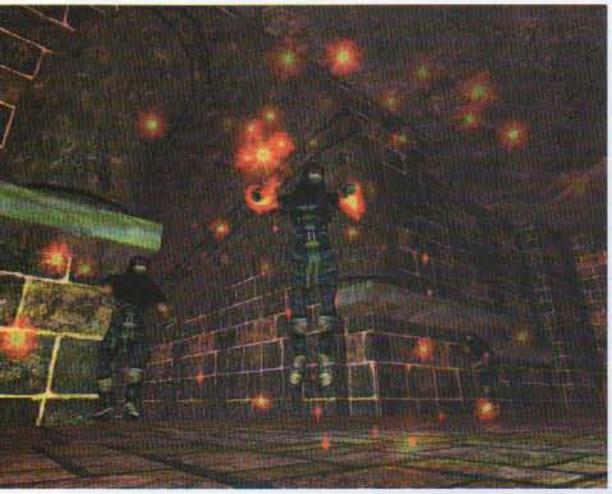
"The response has been amazing. It's the adaptability of these games which gives us so much scope for presenting fun activities"

Now *EverQuest* is enjoying great success with 80,000 players typically roaming the world of Kunark at any one time. But one of the most profound qualities generated by persistent worlds is the ability for developers to constantly enhance them. *EverQuest*'s latest expansion, *Shadows Of Luclin*, is receiving significant upgrades in all departments: game engine, race types, graphics, architecture and creature types. "Although we are presenting a fiction to the players that they are on the moon of the existing world, Luclin is actually a bunch of zones that fit together," explains **Jeff Butler**, one of *EverQuest*'s main creative forces and its producer. "Some zones you cast a magic spell

Ubi Soft ENTERTAINMENT

Ubi Soft goes *PlanetSide*

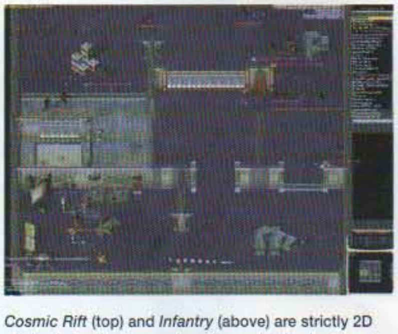
Ubi Soft is adding to its European publishing push by adding *Shadows Of Luclin* and *PlanetSide* to its roster. Ubi Soft already publishes and supports the *EverQuest* expansions, *Ruins Of Kunark* and *Scars Of Velious* which can boast up to 35,000 monthly subscribers in 15 European countries. To celebrate the growing popularity of the MMORPG the company has organised a special *EverQuest* Fan Faire to take place on September 15 in Paris. Interested parties should get their cloaks and bean bags ready and contact Ubi Soft on 01932 838230 for more details.





To address Europe's poor broadband infrastructure pre-paid 'key' cards will be available in stores, although pricing is not finalised at present





Cosmic Rift (top) and *Infantry* (above) are strictly 2D affairs, but offer tremendous gameplay in short bursts. Both can be downloaded from www.station.sony.com

to reach, some you have to ride a boat, others you can simply approach a doorway and transition from one to the next. Luclin will feel distant because you'll have to teleport to it by using these magical spires which appeared in the nexus that you were just looking at. Players in the existing world will have to travel to these spires waiting a period of time for the spell to cycle that will transport you. One of the significant enhancements is our ability to display multiple buildings, and wide open spaces where numerous player characters and NPCs are expected to be walking all the time. Something we simply couldn't have contemplated before."

Luclin is already looking significantly superior to the current *EverQuest* world and Butler – a man whose office is completely surrounded by toys and gadgets – is ensuring that there are enough distractions in his digital sandpit to occupy the *EverQuest* faithful. Fans will be delighted to hear that the enhancements will be as much creative as technical. Along with impressive architecture, which includes gladiatorial arenas and gothic cathedrals, all-new player races will be available. The landscape, too, will be replete with a host of new creatures including Vampires – surely a popular move by SOE, catering to those who regularly spend most of their daylight hours organising fear raids. "But players don't pay us enough," interjects Flock. "We didn't know they were going to be in there for an average of 20 hours a week. The price model was based on MUDs and *Ultima Online*, when games didn't have so many players. It was established that $10 a month was the right model. But now we have to think about variability in pricing."

"Players don't pay us enough – we didn't know they were going to be in there for an average of 20 hours a week"

Heavy use and rising prices

It is testament to *EverQuest*'s popularity that pricing policy is currently under discussion. When EA canned *Ultima Worlds Online: Origin* earlier this year it couldn't have been anything but a boost to SOE, but it also highlighted the dangers of expanding an online empire further than it could stretch. "We are doing an awful lot internationally," states Flock. "We are going to roll out *EverQuest* servers in Amsterdam and finalising local language versions this year. We look at it globally. Right now the US is the number two location for online gaming behind Korea and Taiwan. Europe has been a mess because of its socialistic governments and DAT phone systems, which haven't made it well prepared for the advent of the Internet. But it's catching up, and Europe's a hugely important market for us."

Though *EverQuest* successfully dominates the RPG online space, the FPS genre has only been served by limited deathmatch games. *CounterStrike* and *Quake* may still thrill much of the PC community, but a truly absorbing action game with persistent elements has yet to bombard the world's servers. It was a niche which SOE spotted and was keen to fill. *PlanetSide* is preparing for launch towards the end of the year, and is already deserving of all the message board traffic. On the surface, an FPS squad game played online is only a small step on from traditional online deathmatch games. But the addition of a massively multiplayer structure combined with character development has taken some brave design decisions. Already the 20-strong development team is shooting at between 3,000 and 3,500 players divided across the 16 PlanetSide continents. Though the premise is simple – join one of the three main factions in a bid to overthrow the territory of the other two – the gameplay intricacies engendered by persistence



Along with new spell types and creatures, *Shadows Of Luclin* will be cranking up the detail in all departments. Character models will go from 400 polys to 2,000



are encouraging. **Steve George**, *PlanetSide*'s producer, outlines the potential appeal of the MMOFPS. "The day we release this product we are going to get a lot of people doing things we never even thought of. They are going to turn this world into something incredibly dynamic."

Character development is *PlanetSide*'s most alluring element, a feature enthusiastically promoted by the game's designer, **Kevin McCann**. "This is different. As you play over time you develop – gaining ranks, special abilities and experience. You see an actual return in your investment. But the ability to learn is supportive, it will not make you aim better or give you higher health points. We are not trying to make your character Auto-man." Battles will take place on a huge scale, pitching squad against squad and vehicle against vehicle. Each of the battle continents has three main bases, protected by the three empires – the Vanu Sovereignty, the New Conglomerate, and the Terran Empire. Communication towers, radar stations, manufacturing plants and power generators will provide secondary targets, which, if captured, can be used to the advantage of the capturing team.

"Each of our continents is 8km by 8km," continues McCann. "Versus real life terrain this doesn't seem that large, but in a game context it's extremely big. Our vehicles include quad bikes, buggies, tanks and airborne gunships and dropships. If you die you respawn at the last captured base with a vehicle at hand. So it won't take you long to get back in the thick of the action." Along with armour options, weapon upgrades and skill enhancements, the ability to jump inside a dropship or buggy – which can be armed with a variety of gun mounts – is certainly a mouth watering prospect.

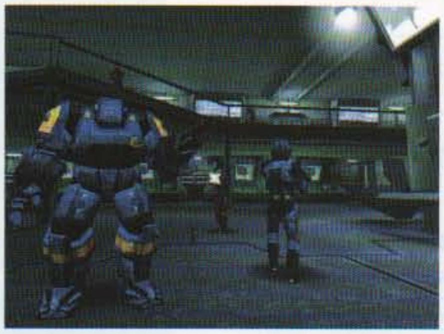
"One of our main goals was to show everything in action," adds McCann. "So you pick up a weapon and you see it on the soldier. You can see if someone has an assault rifle or a sniper rifle. You see what people are doing in the game at all times right down to the reload." But more impressive still is an experience system which allows players to enhance their skills once the mission ends. This naturally generates specialists – medics, techs, snipers, infiltrators – each with their own impact on the game world. Become adept in technical skills and you will be able to hack into computer systems, vehicles and doors. Players upgrading their armour to a stealth suit will be able to scout, infiltrate enemy bases and plant explosives. "The faster you move in a stealth suit the more visible you become," enthuses McCann. "You have a little electronic meter, so when you are running it will indicate how visible you are. We do have devices that you can fire at walls that can help reveal spies. Pulsing negative light will reveal anything in proximity to the device."

McCann is typical of the staff around the SOE offices: completely single-minded and dedicated to their beloved genre. McCann can even boast some of the highest league rankings in just about any FPS game. But it's such dedication which has made these games possible at all. When asked if he takes into account consumer input Flock is dismissive, relying instead on the expertise of his staff. "No, we never talk to consumers – they just fuck us up. Someone asked for a copy of our market research which made us take the decision to do *EverQuest*. I said we hadn't done any market research. Had we done, the game would never have been made. We never focus on them. Gamers don't know what they want. We just want to know if they have a valid credit card."

Vehicles are already handling beautifully in *PlanetSide*. Players can choose to either drive or man the gun mount









Players can relax away from the *PlanetSide* mayhem in their tailor-made 'apartment'. Other players can enter only from special invites

Star Wars Galaxies

But even the outspoken Flock is remaining tight-lipped about his most precious game, *Star Wars Galaxies*. "We're the developer, so for three days a week we get to be the heavy-handed publisher and for two days we get to be the subservient developer to Lucas Arts," he relates cautiously. "I would say 'Star Trek' is a big property, 'Star Wars' is a cultural phenomenon. But we don't have the nut jobs that have seen the movies 600 times working on the games. Most of them have gone to college."

But *EverQuest* is still SOE's strongest property. "We kick *Ultima Online*'s ass," points out Flock. "They are rivals in a sense, but the market is still small. If you count all the subscribers who are playing online games it's well under a million. We don't like competition, but it will be interesting to see what will happen in the next few years. We are hopeful that *Star Wars* will attract people that are unaware of this category, and then I think half of US households will be playing some form of online game."

Ironically, the greatest danger *PlanetSide* and *EverQuest* face could be from *Star Wars Galaxies*. The game is already generating overwhelming enthusiasm. Can any other persistent world resist the force of the world's most recognised entertainment franchise? *Sovereign* and *PlanetSide* have three years to do so. "By then we will conquer Europe too," concludes Flock. So, expect many more miles of fibre cable to be laid down in SOE's name before the game is up.





Though at least two years away from beta testing, *Star Wars Galaxies* is already generating hysteria in the States. The short demo at E3 was enough to win the title runner-up of the show behind GameCube

The Magazine Game

Since their inception in the '80s, videogame magazines have, arguably, played as influential a part in the market as the games themselves. Edge goes back to its roots

"I went from only being able to afford one game every couple of months," recalls **Julian 'Jaz' Rignall**, "to being on a magazine with a library of six or seven hundred Commodore 64 games. I just could not believe it – and I was being paid for it, too. For months and months, I was going to work at ten in the morning, and wouldn't leave until two or three at night. Me and Gary [Penn] would just sit and play games. Our text was very raw at the start, but we were eager to learn. It was fantastic."

Teenage kicks

As a peer on most teenage aspirational hitlists to money, sex, global fame and booze, life as a videogame reviewer has been daydream fodder since the dawn of the '80s. It's perhaps fitting, then, that the embryonic games magazine market was revolutionised by those who cared most: the players/readers themselves. In 1984, in the remote town of Ludlow in Shropshire, a template for the videogame magazine was born: *Crash!*

By way of a belated prologue, it's worth remembering that magazines containing gaming content did exist before *Crash!* made its debut. EMAP's *Computer And Video Games* (*C&VG*) and *Sinclair User*, amongst other, less memorable titles, had existed since the early '80s. **Roger Kean**, co-founder of Newsfield and launch editor of *Crash!*, was far from enamoured with the prospective competition: "It seemed the people writing their small reviews neither cared much about the games nor understood what they were doing.

"*Sinclair User* felt they had to devote space to games, because there were advertisers out there that wanted to part











Before the advent of desktop publishing and full-colour magzines, titles like *Crash!* and *ZZAP!* would often feature entire sections printed in black and white, or sections with 'spot' colour – hence the vibrant use of green and yellow (above). And, in many ways, Newsfield was ahead of the game in terms of technology...



Edge issue 1, circa 1993. Amazingly, pristine, bagged issues, have been sold on eBay for £60

Computer And Video Games

Date launched: November 1981
Launch editor: Terry Pratt
Format: Multiformat
Best ABC figure: circa 100,000
Publishing house: EMAP/Dennis
Launch price: 75p



Relaunched more times, or so it seems, than the cinematic representation of the Titanic, *C&VG* has the unique distinction – in the field of games magazines – of being older than many of its readers. That's a remarkable achievement, given that **Edge** is considered an elder statesman of the industry at 102 issues. Despite the odd periodic identity crisis, *C&VG* has been one of the UK industry's few constants; it's a mountain amidst the sand of former rivals.

From its dry beginnings to its packed days under the stewardship of Paul Davis and his merry band of otaku, *C&VG* has been at least informative at worst, and downright essential at best. Many observers were surprised, then, when rumours circulated about EMAP's willingness to sell the title. On February 21 this year, the magazine finally left its publisher of almost 20 years to join Felix Dennis' empire.

with money. I don't think they took them very seriously, and they seemed to regard them as the 'tacky' end of the market. *C&VG*, at least, was completely – supposedly – given over to games, but actually it wasn't. And it had some of the most absurd articles. We thought it wasn't very focused, it wasn't what the kids wanted, and it only ever reviewed about a quarter of all the games that came out in a month. So, funnily enough, the inspiration for *Crash!* was actually quite a negative one – we looked at the market and thought we could do better."

Rignall, who would later leave Newsfield for EMAP and *C&VG*, relates the following anecdote: "I can remember speaking to Eugene Lacey about how *Computer And Video Games* came to be in the early days. They had crazy things like an art editor who didn't want to use screenshots, because she didn't think they were interesting, and who would actually commission illustrations for the reviews instead of game shots – which is mind-boggling. It was also very, very dry, which is why *Crash!* and *ZZAP!* raised the stakes."

With little capital to fund early issues, let alone a full-time team – *Crash!* was initially printed on low-quality paper stock, with its few colour pages reserved largely for advertisements – Kean and brothers Oliver and Franco Frey diligently tapped a ready source of dedicated, passionate game fans. "We had about eight or nine Ludlow schoolkids coming in regularly after school, picking up some games, then coming back with the reviews a couple of days later," Kean reveals. "I basically rewrote, or wrote the copy almost under dictation sessions with the kids we were using."

The reviews in *Crash!* were written, according to former writer, now PR guru **Richard Eddy**: "By people who actually understood the value of a five or six quid game. That sort of input gave it its almost 'fan' appeal, as well. It wasn't a bunch of old blokes putting reviews on paper but never actually playing games at home. It was often illegible and had to be rewritten, but you got the gist of it, and certainly the enthusiasm. There's a lot of good talen in the industry today that began their careers as Newsfield schoolkids…"

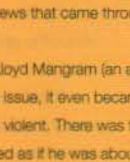
Although Newsfield's penchant for employing youthful reviewers continue throughout its existence, the 1985 launch of *ZZAP! 64* was approached in more conventional manner. Chris Anderson, erstwhile founder of *Person Computer Games* (and, indeed, Future



EMAP's *Sinclair User*, though first to market, was invariably a poor relation to *Crash!* and *Your Sinclair*. Before *Crash!*, its games coverage was limited at best

Crash!

Date launched: February 1984
Launch editor: Roger Kean
Format: Spectrum
Best ABC figure: 106,000
Publishing house: Newsfield
Launch price: 75p



Instrumental in kick-starting the videogame magazine as we know it today, *Crash!* was also a far better read than many initially recall. Honest and authoritative, it was a true cover-to-cover read. Well before the advent of the Internet, its news coverage was worthy of note, too. "One of the strongest things about *Crash!* and *ZZAP!* was that the news that came through as well as the reviews. It was always very well done," says Richard Eddy.

The things that people recall most fondly about *Crash!* vary – for some, it's Lloyd Mangram (an asset the magazine also shared with *ZZAP! 64*). For others, it was the magazine's honesty. For one memorable issue, it even became a top-shelf magazine. "That had nothing to do with sex, though," laughs Oliver Frey. "It was because it was violent. There was this barbarian, and they were fighting, and he had his opponent gripped around the neck, I think, and it looked as if he was about to slit his throat. He hadn't done it yet, of course. But WH Smiths really didn't like that."

ZZAP! 64

Date launched: May 1985
Launch editor: Chris Anderson
Format: C64 (and, for a period, Amiga)
Best ABC figure: 88,000
Publishing house: Newsfield
Launch price: 95p



Not only was it the most successful C64 magazine of all time, *ZZAP! 64* was also remarkable for the people who worked on it: Chris Anderson, Bob Wade, Gary Penn, Julian Rignall, Gary Liddon, Richard Eddy, Steve Jarratt and Paul Glancey, amongst others, spent time on the title. It is also responsible, albeit indirectly, for the existence of **Edge** – without it, Jarratt might never have launched **Edge**, and Chris Anderson's Future Publishing might have been a different beast entirely.

Like *Crash!*, *ZZAP!*'s reviews were distinct: non-committal body copy that would explain how a game worked, then up to four 'comments' from the likes of Jarratt. "I'm quite happy with the tone that we had," he says, "although they were perhaps a little bit dry. Back then, I didn't really have enough experience to suggest any different. We had an an enormous amount of games to review. You couldn't give any more than two or three pages to a game, because it would eat up a huge chunk of your pagination. We used to get 30 or 40 games per issue – something like ten games each to review."



One of Future's most popular titles is the long-lamented *Superplay*. Every cover was illustrated by Wil Overton, who currently designs Star Foxes for Rare

Publishing), was appointed as editor. "*ZZAP!* started differently in as much as Chris hired Gary Penn, Julian Rignall and Bob [Wade]," explains Eddy. "They'd been picked by Chris, and obviously quite well, in the sense that although they were out of school and enthusiastic, they were also keen to be good writers, and approached things with a more professional outlook than the people in Ludlow."

It's hard to underplay the fervent following that *Crash!* and *ZZAP! 64*'s distinct approach engendered. Initially distinguished by their passion and knowledge, both acquired a clear identity as their youthful writers, under the tutelage of the first generation of full-time staff and the ever-present Kean, began to craft the titles with greater confidence and ability. The identity of both titles – indeed, of Newsfield's entire output throughout its life – was indellibly tied to the artwork of Oliver Frey. His unique (and occasionally risqué or gory) covers are recalled by a number of former readers with as much fondness as any particular piece of editorial you care to mention.

"That was a lot of Roger [Kean]'s doing," says Frey. "He used to come up with ideas that I thought were impossible to actually do, which were less connected to an individual game. It was more the case that he wanted to get messages across, or jokes, or things like that. It was to make the covers a bit more... well, 'surreal' is a bit exaggerated, but something more than a bog-standard illustration of a particular game."

The Newsfield blueprint was no longer the sole preserve of the Ludlow publisher during the mid to late '80s; as their rivals were quick to learn. EMAP's stable of titles improved and grew, while other outfits – most notably, Chris Anderson's Future Publishing, proprietor of the magazine you hold in your hands now – made headway in both 8bit and, more significantly, 16bit markets.

"They had crazy things like an art editor who didn't want to use screenshots, because she didn't think they were interesting, and who would actually commission illustrations for the reviews instead of game shots"

Aspirational publishing

A big shift in the market came in 1987, which saw the launch of Future's *Advanced Computer Entertainment* (*ACE*) and Newsfield's *The Games Machine*. The Games Machine didn't last long, beaten – ostensibly – by rival

Amiga Power

Date launched: April 1991
Launch editor: Matt Bielby
Format: Amiga, CD32
Best ABC figure: Circa 65,000
Publishing house: Future Publishing
Launch price: £2.95 (with full game)



There are few magazines that could survive the forcible removal of their USP after a mere two issues, but *Amiga Power* did just that. Initially, *AP* was to offer a full game on its cover-mounted disc every month. ELSPA and its members, however, had become increasingly twitchy about the damage allegedly made upon the Spectrum and C64 software industries by magazines offering the 'free' gift of tapes packed with back-catalogue games. (The same accusation had been previously levelled, incidentally, at the budget software trade.) With writers of the calibre of Mark Ramshaw (later to become editor) and Stuart Campbell (the king of the punitory review score), *Amiga Power* soon developed its own distinctive voice. Later, its disputes with publishers and developers became the stuff of industry legend. Although they continued to advertise, US Gold refused to send *AP* evaluation copies of its games for most of its shelf life after one particularly critical review. "We were inspired by *Crash!*," reveals Campbell. "Even in the early days, they'd occasionally run into pressure from publishers, but, amazingly, they'd tell you about it. We did the same: our reasoning was 'Well, we'll tell the readers about the whole thing, and they can make their own minds up about it.'"



Newfield pioneered the covermount demo tape with *Crash!* and latterly *ZZAP! 64*, although these were isolated events. Future Publishing would later take covermounting to its logical extreme with CDs and, latterly, DVDs

Super Play



Date launched November 1992
Launch editor: Matt Bielby
Format: Super Nintendo
Best ABC figure: Circa 45,000
Publishing house: Future Publishing
Launch price: £1.95

So good, two **Edge** editors – Tony Mott and Jason Brookes – had their first writing jobs on it. Unlike many magazines, which by this point were slipping into the '90s malaise of simply using stock pictures provided by videogame publishers, *Super Play* used original artwork on every cover, and within each issue. The young man responsible for these fine works, Wil Overton (the Oliver Frey of his day in certain respects), now plies his trade at Rare. Make of that what you will but, as Zy Nicholson states: "Wil was *Super Play*, to a large extent. He didn't just do the illustrations: he was a fanatic as well." From the sheer amount of information and little touches in each copy, to poor, abused Neko on the subs page, *Super Play* is an object lesson in how to make a superb games magazine. "We used to keep shoving stuff in," reveals Nicholson. "The first thing that I did, and I know Wil and Tony did it when they turned up, was to learn how to use *Quark Xpress* – industry-standard DTP program]. We'd add bits after documents had been subbed, fiddle around with captions to make them funny again, and mess around with the copy flow for ages to fit a few extra words in. Despite that, one fan still found time to criticise our over-keen review of *Rage Racer*. There's just no pleasing some people."



The legendary *Crash!*, replete with cover image by prolific artist Oliver Frey. This title, more than any other, set the tone for videogame magazines to come

ACE. "All the *Crash!* and *ZZAP!*s we'd grown up with were still treating readers as 14-year-olds," says **Andy Smith**, staff writer on *ACE* from its inception to its eventual sale to EMAP. "Now, we knew that the people buying *ACE* were 14- to 20-year-olds, but we thought 'Let's treat everyone like they're 25, and they can aspire to it."

While the 8bit magazine market remained strong through 1988, the software market was stagnating, largely due to the sheer success of budget ranges. The 16bit consoles, however, were rapidly becoming affordable, with strong support from game publishers. Future launched *ST/Amiga Format* during this period, but 1989 was to be a more significant year for the company. "*ACE* was sold to EMAP for a million quid," says Smith, "which kind of founded Future, in a way. It allowed them to buy property in Bath outright, which relieved worries that Chris [Anderson] had back then about rent in the city."

With an editorial team free, Future split *ST/Amiga Format* to create two individual magazines, the Commodore-oriented title becoming an enormous success. It also launched *Sega Power*, once known simply as *S: The Sega Mag*. In 1990, it acquired Spectrum title *Your Sinclair* from Dennis and, belatedly, entered the C64 market with *Commodore Format*.

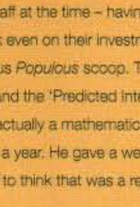
Newsfield's pioneering lead had seen *Crash!* and *ZZAP!* set circulation records for their respective formats – and, with *Crash!*, a benchmark ABC figure of 106,000 that remained unsurpassed until *Amiga Format* finally overtook it the best part of a decade later. The end of Newsfield's dominance began, perhaps, with a haemorrhage of experienced staff during the late '80s – often to rival publishers. Gary Penn, Graeme Kidd and Ciarán Brennan were amongst the first to leave, with the likes of Rignall and **Steve Jarratt** following. **Paul Glancey**, now of developer Criterion, recalls his defection: "EMAP at the time seemed to be very flush with its money. I was still living in Ludlow, and they were putting me up in hotels during the week. It seemed to be the company that you graduated to from Newsfield. I started off as a staff writer, replacing Matt Bielby, who went to *Your Sinclair*."

Rignall also joined EMAP, whose presence in the game magazine market was to grow at the turn of the decade. "Over a period of years, *C&VG* actually turned away from computers, and became more of a console, videogamey



Newfield's ill-fated stab at the multiformat market produced *The Games Machine*, co-edited by Graeme Kidd and Gary Penn. The launch issue, pictured above, would be the last magazine they produced at Newsfield

ACE



Date launched: September 1987
Launch editor: Pete Connor/Steve Cooke
Format: Multiformat
Best ABC figure: Circa 50,000
Publishing house: Future Publishing (later sold to EMAP)
Launch price: £1.50

A precursor to **Edge** in that it attempted to adopt a more 'mature' tone, *ACE* brings back fond memories for many gamers and veteran industry folk. Some, by contrast, didn't get on with it: more than one individual told **Edge** that they found it rather too 'smug' or 'a bit too pleased with itself'. So popular was it, though, that EMAP felt compelled to buy it. Its staff at the time – having just worked on its 22nd issue – tried to calculate the number of years that EMAP would need to run it in order to break even on their investment. Conservative estimates said five years. It survived for less than half of that. Perhaps they were enamoured by its famous *Populous* scoop. The two things that everyone remembers, of course, are the marks out of a thousand – typical Future one-upmanship – and the 'Predicted Interest Curve'. For those that wondered, former writer Andy Smith confirms that there was method to its madness: "That was actually a mathematical calculation that Andy Wilton worked out. I think we had six points – after a minute, an hour, a day, a week, a month and a year. He gave a weighting to each of those things, and you'd score each. You'd think: 'Well, in the first minute I was really excited.' We used to think that was a really fair way of rating a game."

MEGA



Date launched: Summer 1991
Launch editor: Neil West
Format: Mega Drive
Best ABC figure: Circa 70,000
Publishing house: Future Publishing
Launch price: £1.95

It's hard to choose one particular Mega Drive magazine. For a time, the console enjoyed specialist press support of a kind exceeded only by the PlayStation market. *Mean Machines*, with its oft-breathless style, was enormously successful. It was also unashamedly massmarket. *Sega Power* had some fine moments in its early years, but went through a few sticky patches. At one point, it was truly abysmal. *Sega Zone* was excellent; *Mega Machines*, printed to be read with the magazine opened towards the body (portrait, rather than landscape), at least attempted to innovate.

It's *MEGA*, however, that is included here. Maligned at the time by unfair comparisons with *Super Play* – both were launched at the same time – its bold covers and invariably well-written editorial were the composite of many influences. It was not without its quirks, though. *MEGA* did not name its contributors, instead applying a staff member's name. According to freelance writers at the time, the measure of a review's worth was the attributed hack: to get editor Neil West as your byline was the mark of a job well done.



GamesMaster's premiere issue (launched editor: Jim Douglas). This issue sold over 200,000 copies…

magazine, really, in response to the change in the marketplace," he recalls. "And that's where *Mean Machines* came from – it began life as a section in *C&VG*. In the early '90s I can remember constantly going on and on to Graham Taylor who was running the magazine at the time: 'We must launch *Mean Machines* as a magazine!' I think I spent six months brow-beating him."

The rise of EMAP Images, as the company's videogame division was known, continued throughout the console boom, when competition between it and Future Publishing was fierce. One of EMAP's biggest coups was securing the official Nintendo licence.

"*Mean Machines* was hugely popular, but it was just beginning to peak, and that was when EMAP got the licence to do the official Nintendo title," explains Rignall. "It seemed to make sense to have *Mean Machines* as a Sega title, and move all Nintendo content into the official mag." Despite frequent accusations of bias, *Nintendo Magazine System* would go on to comfortably outperform its competitors.

A change of tone

Future Publishing became increasingly prolific during the early '90s, with the launch of *Amiga Power*, *PC Format*, *Total!* and *Super Play*, among many others. The advent of desktop publishing allowed these titles and their peers to be rather more slick than their archaic-looking predecessors. Colour printing became standard, while advances in screen capture technology (first used, according to a number of accounts, by Maverick's *Megatech*) enabled readers to enjoy more original in-game shots with improved clarity. (Previously, game shots were actual photographs of the screen – an expensive, laborious and creatively limiting way of producing images.)

Despite the intervening years, an evolving marketplace and obvious aesthetic differences, though, magazines during the early '90s were often as character-driven as their forebears. The best titles could boast a distinct identity, with a hardcore of fiercely loyal readers. The popularity of titles like *Mean Machines*, *Amiga Power* and *Total!* was clear to those who read the many missives from fans.

"When I was on *Total!*," says Jarratt, "we used to get bucketloads of stuff. It was mainly from kids telling us to make more games, though – they seemed to be a bit confused as to where they came from."



One of the earliest games mags was *PCG*. Often these early titles gave much of their content over to type-in BASIC games which, invariably, never worked

PC Zone



Date launched: March 1993
Launch editor: Paul Lakin
Format: PC
Best ABC figure: 80,000
Publishing house: Dennis
Launch price: £3.95

The popularity of both *PC Gamer* and *PC Zone* throughout the years means that it's difficult to isolate either for exclusive praise. Unlike other magazines mentioned here, the two are – of course – still alive and kicking. Both can boast a history of fine writers, including Jonathan Davies and Jim Flynn on *Gamer*, Steve Hill and Charlie Brooker on *Zone*. "There was an ongoing rivalry between the two magazines," says Brooker, "and I'm sure it was taken very seriously amongst some members of the editorial staff. I can remember writing stuff, like '*Gamer* is the gaming equivalent of the *Daily Mail*,' and nonsense like that. I do remember doing a cartoon of *PC Gamer*'s editor at the time, drawing a picture of his body and inviting readers to cut out a picture of his head and stick it on. But it wasn't his body – it was that of a baby, which was urinating, dancing around in a puddle of shit. It was very puerile. And there was that Cruelty Zoo debacle that got us pulled off the shelves. It was a cartoon I'd done, with a photo montage of children hacking up animals, making some point about… well, I can't remember exactly what. The magazine was pulled off shelves around the country, which did us no favours at all."

Dennis

Felix Dennis's empire – the publisher who so famously had his intelligence impugned during the *Oz* obscenity trial – has flirted with the videogame magazine industry for many years. Twice it has appeared to almost turn its back on this profitable niche: after investing in their growth, Dennis sold *Your Sinclair* to Future in 1990, followed by *Sega Zone* and *Game Zone* in 1993. PC Zone has long been popular, although bettered by rival *PC Gamer* in ABC figures over recent years, while *Official Dreamcast Magazine* had its fans (but not, being a Dreamcast magazine, *that* many). The acquisition of *C&VG* in February might be seen as an obvious statement of intent. But then again, as history has shown, you never can tell with Dennis.

Rapide

Mark Smith's ill-fated empire began life as a contract publishing outfit based in Newton Abbott, Devon. After early work on the *Club Nintendo* magazine, it began to specialise in football titles (for porn/newspaper magnate Richard Desmond's Northern and Shell) and videogame magazines (for Impact Magazines and Paragon). Eventually, Smith thought the time right to commit to the thriving market with his first magazine. "I can remember taking the idea for *Total PlayStation* to Northern and Shell in… I think it was early '96. They said it would never work, so we decided to do things ourselves." Steady, then significant growth for Rapide was accompanied by a move to bigger offices and more staff. Just as the company was embracing greater professionalism to accompany the obvious (if occasionally misguided) enthusiasm of its better magazines, the coffers ran dry.

Paragon

Founded in 1990, Paragon is the last in a generation of 'bedroom publishers' to have achieved stability and success in the videogame magazine market. Of its magazines, *Play* has always been the one to attract plaudits; it has been opined that, with greater investment, it might have distinguished itself more in a choked PlayStation market. The 1999 management buy-in of Mark Simpson (backed by the Bank of Scotland and 3i) was followed by the acquisition of IDG Media (formerly known as Europress). Paragon is also the place where Dave Perry – of *GamesMaster*, not Shiny, fame – initially made his name.

EMAP

Future's principle rival throughout the '90s, EMAP has launched several videogame titles since *Computer And Video Games*' debut so very long ago. From *Sinclair User* – poor relation to *Crash!* and *Your Sinclair* that it was – to the mighty *Mean Machines* and its success with 'official' Sega and Nintendo magazines, EMAP's contribution to the modern game magazine is not inconsiderable.

Newsfield

Its contribution to the games magazine as we know it is well documented, and is covered elsewhere in this feature. Despite early success, Newsfield could never quite rediscover the alchemy that made *Crash!* and *ZZAP! 64* work so well. A number of subsequent launches flopped and, with titles by Future, EMAP and Dennis eroding the readership of its once unbeatable duo towards the end of the '80s, Newsfield's existence became increasingly precarious; in 1991, it finally closed its doors. Phoenix-like, the Ludlow operation rose from the ashes in the guise of Europress Impact within six weeks, funded by the Macclesfield-based company whose name it now shared. *Crash!* was sold to EMAP (who incorporated it into *Sinclair User*), while *ZZAP!* continued alongside a stable of only moderately popular console magazines. Its second death, in 1994, was final, although a contract publishing division was saved – later to become a foothold for tips book publisher Prima in the UK.

Future

In 1993, Future first published **Edge**. The rest, as they say, is history… although you can visit www.futurenet.co.uk to read a full(-ish) account, if you so wish.

Just as PlayStation magazines in the latter part of the decade were heavily influenced by the 'lifestyle' market (and *Loaded* in particular), adult comic *Viz* had a profound effect on the late 8bit and 16bit magazines. Innuendo was, of course, relatively common in *Crash!* and *ZZAP! 64* – indeed, the urbane Lloyd Mangram was not adverse to employing an artful double entendre – but the popularity of *Viz* was apparent in many titles.

"In *Mean Machines* we were always really pushing the humour," says Rignall, "trying to say as many risqué things as possible without being actually being technically disgusting." Exceptions fostered their own brand of humour and in-jokes; *Your Sinclair*, *Amiga Power* and, especially, *Sega Power* (under the editorship of Andy Lowe) became a near-impenetrable fog of in-jokes to all but regular readers in their later issues.

The write stuff

It's hardly surprising that many long-term readers regard the 16bit era as a golden age of game magazines. Future's policy of appointing gamers who could also write – in that order of significance – mirrored that of Newsfield. Although the reviewers were generally a little older, the fervour remained (indeed, much of it was directly created by the Newsfield titles), and this time it was also backed up with some writing flair. If anything, magazine staff were known to be more passionate than their predecessors. **Zy Nicholson**, former *Super Play* wordsmith, relates a typical tale: "I was living in a house with Tony Mott at the time. And then, when Wil [Overton – now a designer at Rare] got the job with *Super Play*, he was sleeping on our sofa. We'd basically work in the office from nine thirty to midnight, then come back home to play *Street Fighter* and drink cheap bottles of cider."

Of course, there was a flipside to all this intense cameraderie too. "Because staff on new mags would all join the company at once, you'd often end up living in shared houses with your mag colleagues, hence being in each other's pockets more or less 24/7," says **Stuart Campbell**, who used to work on *Amiga Power*. "I remember one time after a particularly heavy issue, I had a falling out with [fellow writer] Mark Ramshaw, and we ended up with him outside the house trying to kick the door in, and me waiting in the hallway with a carving knife to kill him."



ACE and its infamous 'Predicted Interest Curve'. Writers used to employ a small Tandy laptop to calculate the final result

But even in the modern, saturated, professional and ultra-competitive market, some things didn't seem to have changed much since the Newsfiel era. Charged with another relaunch of *C&VG*, **Paul Davis** assembled a team of young hardcore gamers to realise his vision of how the veteran magazine should be: "We did the best magazine we thought we could do, without being all that professional at all – that's how it was early on. Ed Lomas joined, and I think he was only about 16 or 17. He was totally committed. He'd get on people's nerves, because he ran arounc screaming all the time like a young lad. Or young girl. He'd do all kinds of crazy stuff, like if he was working on a fighting game, he'd get pieces of string to measure how much damage each hit did. We just let him get on with it."

Davis' anecdote, of course, could as easily have fitted in at the start of this feature as at the end. And what that reveals is that for all the superficial changes, the basic formula for a videogame magazine has remained constant almost since the format's inception two decades ago: get a load of kids in, harness their boundless natural enthusiasm (and pay 'em pay peanuts), employ one or two vaguely professional hacks to buff down the rough edges and you're away. As the average age of gamers increases, though, and the Internet chips away at the mystique and authority of the printed word, it's arguable that we're coming to the end of this era. What will come after it remains to be seen.

testscreen

The world's most respected videogame reviews

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the Edge

This month's unanimous choices...

Card Fighters Clash

The prospect of an imminent sequel saw another airing for **Edge**'s impressive 'Miyamoto Touch' deck. A GBA version has to be on the... um... cards. Sorry.



(NGPC) SNK

Tempest 2000

In the absence of a Nuon, **Edge** went back to Jeff Minter's glorious melt-o-vision version of Tempest. Still terrifyingly addictive despite the dodgy joypad.



(Jaguar) Atari

Gran Turismo 3: A-spec

The sheer scope of the Gran Turismo mode, along with the easily accessible Arcade mode, ensure that *GT3* continues its dominance of British living rooms.



(PS2) SCEE

Strider 2

More a series of mini-bosses than an all-out platformer, *Strider 2* still manages to champion 2D in a videogame world dominated by erratic 3D cameras.



(PSone) Capcom

Blind tasting

The pleasures of PR-light gaming

Just as the text for TestScreen intro slips from code amber (explanation: article persistently requested by production) to code red (production requires article's immediate genesis and/or note from writer's physician), an email arrives in **Edge**'s inbox regarding a software demo. Halfway through, a carefully worded request stands out: "We'd be grateful if you could ensure that the person attending the presentation is the person that will actually be reviewing the game, since it takes some explaining. We just want to tell you what we've done and why we've done it."

There are two schools of thought here. One: given what we know about the attention span of typical videogame journalists, it's not too unreasonable for PRs to ask for an hour of their time to make sure they know where the 'jump' button is. Two: if a game takes some explaining, then it's too complex. Moreover, if you feel the need to justify why you've done something in a game, then maybe it shouldn't be in there in the first place.

All of which just makes the import gaming experience all the more enjoyable. Reviewing from boxed Japanese code provides respite from thick verbal and textual fog, and also reveals a truth. We don't need manuals, and we don't need explanations. Gaming pleasure is more acute when it's a journey of discovery. Give the player a world, a controller, and let them experiment.

Of course, there are limits. While the office is peppered with polyglots, **Edge**'s policy is to only review imports where the text isn't the driving force. *Dark Cloud*'s review delay is down to that, and *Final Fantasy X* will be the same, as unless you're absolutely fluent in kana and kanji, reviewing it from Japanese code is nonsensical. The problem isn't comprehension: it's easy enough make your way through the game. But rating something so dependant on plot and character without being able to understand it is idiocy.

Back in the Western world, *Max Payne* still contrives to disappoint. Blame an Internet twist on the Emperor's New Clothes. An exclusive review whets the appetites of gamers, who spiral the hype and heap it on themselves via the Net. On release day, the smoke and mirrors imagery hits its target spot on: stylish, brutal, adolescent, vacuous. Gaming forums fill with praise. Then the smoke clears, as do the *Payne* discussions, but the *Mario Kart* importers' conversations keep going. Why? Play them. No explanation needed.











Mario Kart Advance

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Intelligent Systems** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

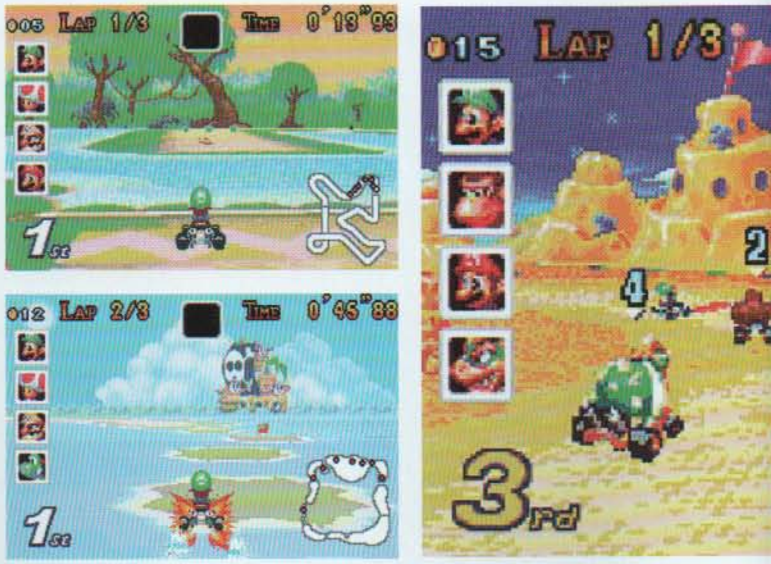


Multiplayer modes are slightly limited with one cartridge, but four-cartridge link-up play supports a host of modes, including a rather chaotic fourplayer Battle mode

Choosing the most extravagantly perilous racing line, trusting only to skills that have been finely honed over months of dedicated racing in a bid to shave milliseconds from a lap time. And pulling it off. Getting hold of a thunderbolt when the chips are down. And unleashing it to your opponent's evident dismay. Evading a red shell with a preposterous abuse of the track layout. *Mario Kart* on the SNES provided some of the purest gaming moments in the history of the videogame medium, providing the most assured evidence to support the argument that Nintendo doesn't just make games for kids.

Mario Kart on the N64, although a competent title in its own right, was simply an unworthy heir to this weighty mantle. 3D visuals were scant consolation to gamers reared on sublime moments of deep play, and shallow handling and substandard courses served only to twist the knife. Thankfully, the eagerly awaited *Mario Kart Advance* remains true to the ethics of the original, reworking a near-perfect formula with immense subtlety and banishing memories of the substandard N64 outing. It's a masterpiece.

Perhaps the most crucial factor in the success of the original *Mario Kart* was handling that combined immediate accessibility with an almost absurd level of depth. The latest installment revises the minutiae, offering a looser level of control, but it crucially retains both of these characteristics. So, while novice players can still muddle their way round courses in reasonable time, the more practiced can utilise hops and powerslides to lop seconds off their lap times, and thanks to a new and welcome addition – inspired by the convoluted stick waggle of the N64 – they can also benefit from a brief speed boost if powerslides are timed correctly.



It's more than likely that anyone raised on the SNES original would have been woefully disappointed by the lacklustre update that was the N64 version of *Mario Kart*. They won't be by *Mario Kart Advance*

Structurally the game treads familiar ground, consisting in the main of five GP cups over three speeds, and corresponding time trials. This basic structure has been enhanced by a ranking scheme that requires players to amass as many coins as possible on their way to a gold cup. Ordinarily, **Edge** would be loath to recommend such a hackneyed platforming element, were it not for the fact that reaching the highest standing requires an almost wilful disregard for the racing line, and the utmost kart control.

Of course, a hugely important part of the *Mario Kart* experience is the multiplayer, and in this too devotees have been richly rewarded. The constraints of the Game Boy Advance do mean a loss of a certain group dynamic, but with link-up play supporting fourplayer participation in GP and Battle modes, and a single cartridge supporting twoplayer competition over five courses, albeit driving only as Yoshi, it's unlikely that this will prove too problematic.

The most convincing proof that *Mario Kart Advance* is a worthy successor to the SNES version is in the design and layout of the tracks. Since all of the original courses are available to be unlocked, players can witness for themselves that despite the mythic resonance of the originals, many of the newer tracks are every bit their equal, and maintain the ethos of their forerunners – Ghost Valley is still characterised by plentiful short cuts, while Bowser Castle still requires judiciously timed powerslides, for example.

In short, everything about the original *Mario Kart* that engendered countless hours of deep play has been updated and enhanced, making it likely that this new incarnation will shape the cultural psyche of a whole generation of gamers in the same way that its forerunner did.

The eagerly awaited *Mario Kart Advance* remains true to the ethics of the original, reworking a near-perfect formula with immense subtlety



Bowser Castle courses are indicative of *Mario Kart Advance*'s return to SNES form. Unpredictablility is out, in favour of the unfettered use of powerslides to a charmingly nu-metal themed soundtrack

Edge rating: Nine out of ten















Old favourites, such as Ghost Valley, mark their return with all the short cuts and so on that made them so well-loved, while newer additions, like Ribbon Road (above right) have their own distinctive flavourings



Although it's essentially a superfluous detail, visually the game sits somewhere between the SNES and N64 versions. It's a shame that the lack of backlighting doesn't do justice to impressive backgrounds

64bit borrowings



Where *Mario Kart Advance* has borrowed elements from the less than stellar *Mario Kart 64*, it has been done with intelligence and panache. This is most evident in the revised powerslide speed boost, but there's also the small matter of power-ups. Though the loss of the SNES feather will disappoint hardcore followers, it does push the balance of play from luck towards skill, and the inclusion of the multiple shells and the homing spiked shell from the 64bit outing are adequate consolation, adding another strategic dimension to multiplayer competition.

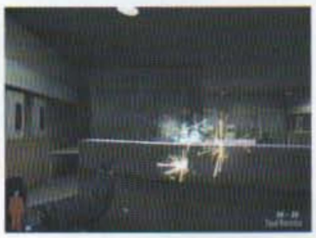
Max Payne

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Take 2** Developer: **3d Realms** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**









Graphic novel-style storyboards illustrate Payne's progress through the adventure. The overwritten dialogue reads like an easy pastiche of a '50s radio play

A hypothesis: some time ago, the fictional Max Payne chews popcorn and watches the closing choreographed gunfire snowstorm of 'Hard Boiled' for the thousandth time. It's perfect. One hand reaches into the popcorn bucket, the other hits the rewind button. Some day, Max Payne wants to be in a movie.

Four years later, conceived in an infinite loop of gruff film noir, classic Woo, and – naturally – 'The Matrix', Max Payne finally makes it to monitors worldwide and fulfils all superficial expectations. Label it hyperaction by numbers, and run through the checklist: dark, roguish pseudo-apathy; comic-strip cut-scenes; gravel voice acting; and a script which rollercoasters from genius parody to lazy half-cut metaphors. Then there's the familiar hook: Max Payne is a man with nothing to lose, fighting a vigilante war against drug lords in the name of his dead wife and child. But while Max Payne wants to be in a movie, if you remove the game's epic stylings, he's actually in *Time Crisis*.

The mouse and keyboard control is identical to a generic thirdperson shooter, augmented by a Bullet Time button which sends everything into shot-dodging slow motion. Seen previously in *Perfect Dark*, it's a dynamic with much potential, and *Max Payne* successfully integrates it into its core. A gauge that refills a little with every kill limits the Bullet Time, forcing the player to combine startlingly fast realtime antics with the more rewarding and balletic slo-mo slaughter. Press the button at the same time as a direction and Payne dives gracefully, while still offering the player full control over the direction of their fire. Technically it's magnificent; as a gaming idea, it's certainly more than just a simple gimmick; but the novel killing methods don't change the fact

Max Payne is a man with nothing to lose, fighting a vigilante war against drug lords in the name of his dead wife and child

that *Max Payne* is as shallow as it is beautiful.

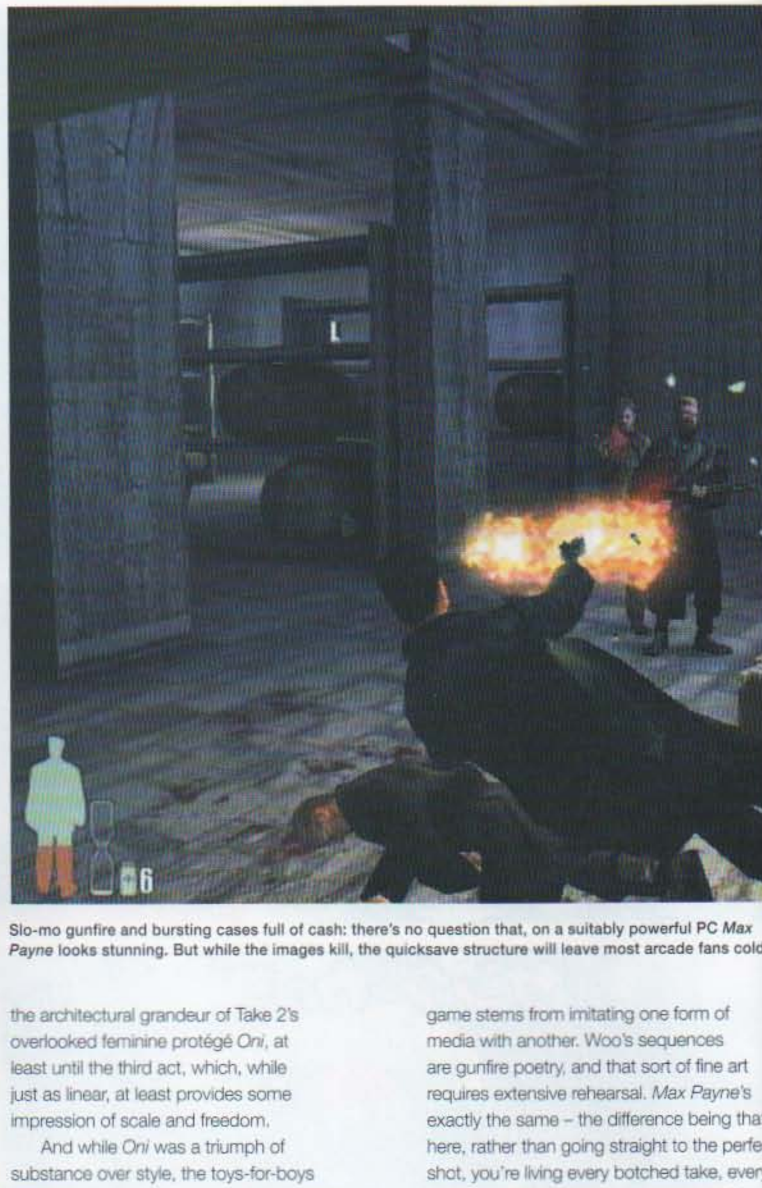
The *Time Crisis* analogy doesn't just come from Payne's mindless shooting, but also from the on-rails routing. The level structure is disappointingly straightforwards – little more than a series of rooms linked with a single route for much of the first two sections, one-way corridors that snake neatly towards miniature climaxes. There's none of the architectural grandeur of Take 2's overlooked feminine protégé *Oni*, at least until the third act, which, while just as linear, at least provides some impression of scale and freedom.

And while *Oni* was a triumph of substance over style, the toys-for-boys *Payne* could well be a victim of the reverse. Isolate five minutes of play from the Trenchcoat Mafia chic that cloaks it, and it's surprisingly weak. Press F5 to quicksave; run down a corridor, and Max coolly pauses outside an inevitably villain-filled room. Press F5 again, activate bullet time, and dive inside; watch the pack of slow motion bullets leave white-line sentence traces; keep watching as they punctuate Max's gently falling body with red full stops; sigh, hit reload, and try again. And again, and again, until you get it right.

The fundamental problem faced by the game stems from imitating one form of media with another. Woo's sequences are gunfire poetry, and that sort of fine art requires extensive rehearsal. *Max Payne*'s exactly the same – the difference being that here, rather than going straight to the perfec shot, you're living every botched take, every misfire, until the sequence runs smoothly.

There's still some instinct involved, but this isn't a pure action game, because as beautiful as the scattershot hailstorms are, surviving them often feels more like luck than judgement. As movie cliché dictates, eventually everything works out, and the pay-off popcorn moments stun, but *Payne*'s entertainment value will depend on how much its audience can stomach the constant rewinding.

Edge rating: Six out of te



Slo-mo gunfire and bursting cases full of cash: there's no question that, on a suitably powerful PC *Max Payne* looks stunning. But while the images kill, the quicksave structure will leave most arcade fans cold



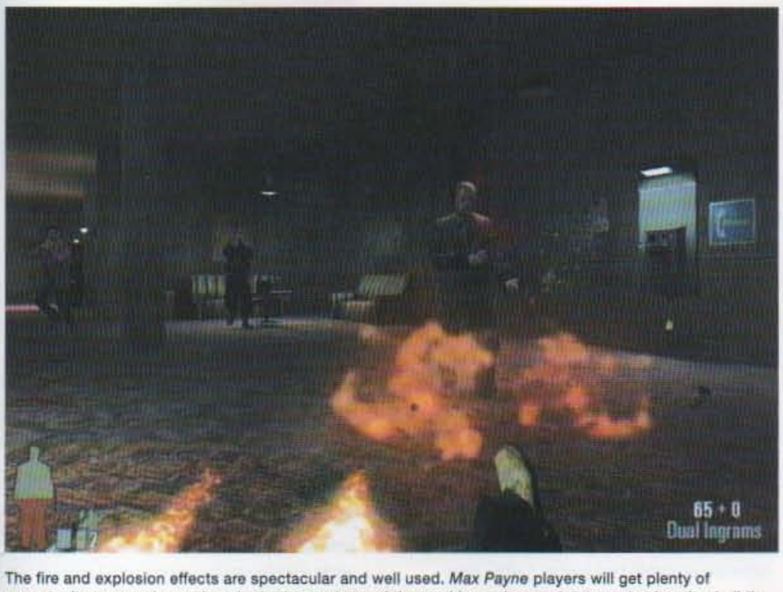








The hourglass in the bottom left indicates the amount of bullet-time left to use. Killing enemies will refill it, but not by much. Dispatching enemies quickly in the brief moments of slow motion is essential



The fire and explosion effects are spectacular and well used. *Max Payne* players will get plenty of opportunity to experience them in the frustrating and thoroughly random sprint through a burning building

Drug-addled platforming nightmare



On two occasions Max finds himself in a hallucinatory dreamworld, sent spiralling into his own psyche by mystery drug Valkyre. The sequences are excellently presented – Payne runs in slow motion, the corridors stretch and warp away from him, and all he can hear is the endless sound of his dead child's crying. Disturbing, but **Edge**'s overriding memory, unfortunately, is of the ill-conceived finale to each trip: a pixel-perfect walk along a floating, fractured and twisting line of blood. It'd be a dreadful enough design element in a generic platform game; the decision to include it here is irritating and absolutely incomprehensible.

Dark Cloud

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**











The introduction of new characters over the course of the game, each with their own upgradeable arsenal, allows the scope of interaction to be increased



Superficial resemblances to *Zelda*'s N64 outings aside, *Dark Cloud* is a potentially more intriguing proposition. That it doesn't quite scale similar heights is not to fault the interweaving and enjoyable gameplay strands

Dark Cloud will no doubt receive short shrift from those who perceive it to be little more than a pallid *Zelda* clone with little of the originality and finesse that makes Miyamoto's vision stand out. This would be to miss the point, as while the games share a similar interface, in the form of a Z-lock-style targeting system and an ostensibly similar thirdperson exploration motif, *Dark Cloud* is, in many ways, a more interesting title than the Zelda series, though not quite so solidly realised.

Considered on its own, the dungeon exploration at the heart of the game shows little originality. One interesting addition, which moderates the pace of exploration and provides a sense of urgency, is that characters require a constant supply of water. That said, navigating a series of randomly spawned levels that contain a diverse ecology of enemies, assisted only by a selection of items that have been left lying around, has been a videogame staple since the likes of *Rogue* and beyond. Similarly, the world-building activities that punctuate these forays are quite simplistic, bearing a superficial resemblance to a cartoonified *Sim City*. The game's achievement – which is significant – is to seamlessly marry the two elements so that each part provides reason to participate in the other in a sort of virtuous cycle of incentive distribution. Towns and villages must be reconstructed and repopulated with items and townspeople that are recovered from dungeon sections, while successful and harmonious city planning reward the player with power-ups, items and narrative progress that inspire further play.

Dark Cloud is, in many ways, a more interesting title than the *Zelda* series, though not quite so spectacularly successful

Fleshing out this core component of the



game is a comprehensive suite of mini-games and a typically sound series of complementary Japanese RPG sub-mechanics. Lay down a pond tile in the city building section, for example, and a fishing game will open up. This requires the player to choose the right bait and set up at the correct time of day in order to catch fish to trade for points and power-ups.

Traditionally styled boss encounters, replete with a single exploitable weakness, also serve to mediate the pace of exploration while mini-boss duels are played out through Bemani-style rhythmic button bashing. As





Dark Cloud's dungeons boast a diverse ecology, but weapons can be upgraded against particular types







Town planning requires fine aesthetic judgement, but inhabitants' needs must also be pandered to if players are to obtain new characters and upgradeable weapons, or if they are to unlock new areas to explore. There's also just the satisfaction of keeping people happy, of course





the game world opens up, the scope of interaction also broadens, thanks to the introduction of new characters, each with their own particular skills and weaponry. Perhaps the most interesting element in the mix is a weapon upgrade system similar to, though more user-friendly than, that of *Vagrant Story*, which rewards tactical forethought with long-term gain.

The only really negative aspects of *Dark Cloud* are the soundtrack and some mediocre cut-scenes. The latter are particularly disappointing, since the narrative veers between the bland and uninspired to the engagingly kooky, but in general these flaws do little to reverse the fact that *Dark Cloud*'s unstintingly involving gameplay – while not as accomplished as *Zelda*'s – is a notable achievement in itself. Over the course of its epic span, *Dark Cloud* is beguilingly enjoyable.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Sound of music

It has always been incumbent on composers of videogame soundtracks to create melodies and riffs which will still be palatable at the end of a 50-hour gaming stint. In this respect *Dark Cloud* fails. Breathtakingly. The shrill pan pipe tweeness that dogs your progress will have you stoppering your ears after just a few hours, and by the time the game reaches its conclusion you will be cursing the lunatic responsible.

Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **Z-Axis** Price: **£40** Release: **October 5**







Occasionally, the camera fails to follow the action closely enough, though it's hardly a problem during air action (above). On a positive note, pressing L1 allows you to look around you in order to work out how to complete challenges. Slowdown can sometimes be a problem in levels with a higher traffic density (right)







RIP BMX RPG

Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2 is all about 'respect'. Having to pass a rookie test in order to 'prove' yourself before you can attempt any of the tasks given, you may mistakenly think that the interaction offered with the riders you come across on the levels is likely to lead to more than it actually does. In reality, this particular feature is massively underused, with the one-sided exchanges simply resulting in the player being set an extra challenge to complete. Furthermore, come into contact with any of these artificial BMX masters mid-run and you always end up on your face, which is unnecessarily frustrating. Still, this is an aspect that may evolve in subsequent Mirra offerings.



The developer has wisely left the modifier trick system of the original game alone, thus ensuring plenty of variety is available to players. The level editor is now significantly enhanced (top, right)

Surprisingly, when *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2* hits the streets, Acclaim will have managed to publish three versions of the title in under a year – a tactic only usually employed by serial release specialist EA. Tha aside, the opportunity to play a potentially improved sequel to a rather enjoyable title (fo those that persevered), with all of the technic enhancements afforded by 128bit hardware, remains a welcome one.

Certainly, many aspects have been polished. The environments – previously wildl unstable – no longer show signs of polygonal break up, and instead behave in a remarkabl controlled manner, with draw distance and model solidity far healthier than that of the PlayStation original. Furthermore, the levels are now significantly more extensive, offering an impressive array of ramps and objects for trick possibilities.

But the graphical look itself, although higher res, isn't legitimately worthy of next-gen status, and smacks of a PlayStation project ported across to PS2 in mid-development cycle. At least you now ride bumps better (in that the bike doesn't take of every time the top of a mound is reached) which encourages smoother play, as well as allowing you to carry better speed into the jump you do want to attempt.

The game's structure has altered, too. Th Amateur, Pro and Hardcore challenges and competition set-up remains, but progression on to new levels is now easier. Dotted around these environments are located some of Mirra's pro riding friends, who you must chat to in order to be set further challenges. Completing tasks earns you respect points, which in turn unlock better equipment.

Some of the challenges don't appear tha well balanced, with the occasional arduous example slipping conspicuously into the mix. But, as a general rule, there is more to do than in previous iterations, and there are further rewards for anyone prepared to dedicate themselves to the cause.

Devotees will find it diverting, too. Despite the frenetic control system (when using digita control) and the absence of progressive acceleration, which contributes towards som particularly clumsy – and infuriating – moments, *Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2* can provide plenty of enjoyment. Like the first game, it's still lacking a certain elegance in term of play mechanics. But also like the first game, it's still captivating.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Ape Escape 2001

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

The original *Ape Escape* introduced Sony gamers to the DualShock, forcing them to discard their D-pads in favour of a twin-stick control method. Odd, then, that the sequel discards the dual analogue handing completely, preferring a simple one-stick system and an equally simple idea. That premise: to strip apes of their pants using a vacuum cleaner, and to dump those pants in a giant washing machine.

Its surrealism aside, *Ape Escape 2001*'s imagery fails to impress. The character models are primitive mammal constructs draped in next-generation resolution, as are the environments – as thematically disparate as tradition dictates, and as colourful and sterile as a low-budget kids' cartoon. But the graphical simplicity is a deliberate decision, and one presumably dictated by frame rates. Rather than sneaking up on specific simians, *Ape Escape 2001*'s evolution puts dozens on screen at once, and turns the game into a frantic dash for underwear closure.

If an ape is wearing pants, he'll run away from you. If you manage to strip him – at which point the pants attach themselves to an increasingly comedic snake of underwear that trails behind your character – he'll run towards you to try and reclaim his clothing. So, as your collection of pants increases, so does the mob intent on retrieving them; as you get closer to completing the level, the game gets more difficult. Imagine 'The Benny Hill Show' reworked by David Attenborough. Lots of monkeys; one joke.

Superficial stuff

And that's the problem. As cute as the idea is in theory, the lack of depth quickly becomes tiring; while increasingly stubborn enemies and predictable pick-ups entertain, they can't save the basic dynamic from succumbing to tedium. The incomprehensibly dumb final level, where the developer discards all previous suck tactics in favour of a dreadful platform-game knock-off, complete with risible camera angles and stupefyingly dull final boss, encapsulates the lack of design consideration. With that in mind, it's to be hoped that the next chapter in vacuum cleaning videogame development – presumably *Luigi's Mansion*, a game whose purpose is rumoured to be to introduce Nintendo gamers to dual analogue control – will be substantially better.

Edge rating: Four out of ten







The number of pants collected is illustrated around the outer edge of the screen. When you've caught them all, they start to flash

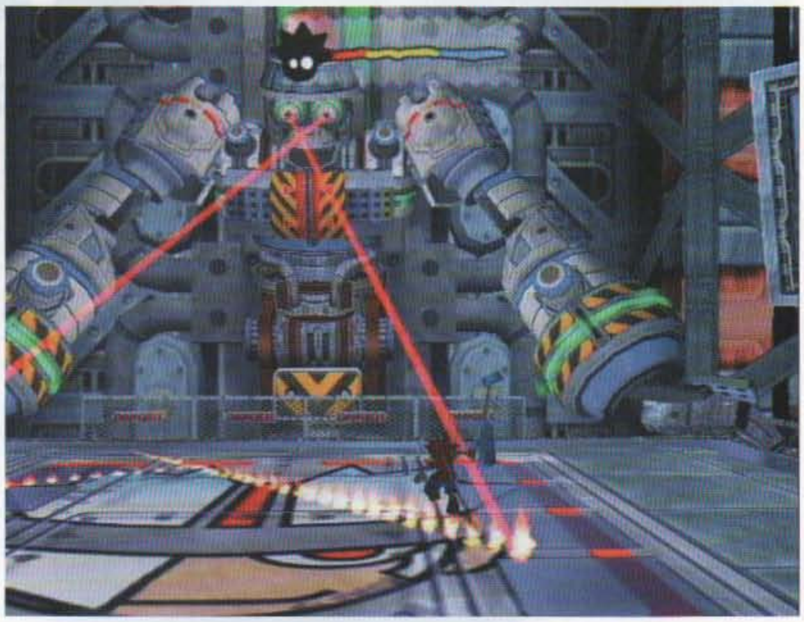






Chimp cruelty

While the models that make up the animal inhabitants are crude, their animation is excellent, and the policy of more characters/less detail pays dividend. Playing Pied Piper to large groups of apes is funny enough, but if the situation gets overly hectic, hammering X makes your hero spin round with his vacuum and knock them all flying. It's a tactic unlikely to get approval from the RSPCA, but then it's a rare game that gives you opportunity to stand victorious in the middle of a clump of 40 prostrate apes



Monkeys come in various guises in the theme levels – cactii, coffins, and goggled skaters all hold the key to pants completion. The game culminates in the appearance of a massive mecha-ape with laser eyes

Floigan Brothers

Format: **DC** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Visual Concepts** Price: **$20 (£14)** Release: **Out now (US) TBC (UK)**











The characterisation in *Floigan* is excellent. Cute cut-scenes frame the action, and provide sparse moments of entertainment, without any of the multi-layered subtlety of some modern-day animations

If Hoigle dives and catches a mouse, it will provide him with a hint. The environments are lush, but confined; clearing the game should only take a few hours



Perturbing perspectives

Getting the camera right in a thirdperson game is crucial, but Visual Concepts' approach is curious. Its principle appears to be that a game as an interactive cartoon requires a swooping camera that is neither passive nor intelligent. Naturally, this impacts badly on the control; the tracking AI is strikingly odd, often losing itself behind objects, panicking and dipping beneath the ground. One notable occurrence sees Hoigle fleeing aimlessly from a junkyard spider, while the camera tracking him meandered behind a nearby fence trying (and failing) to grab a glimpse of the action. Arachnid evasion was understandably difficult.

Two-dimensional aspirations are easy to analyse. If it's *Herdy Gerdy*'s ambition to be classic Disney, then *Floigan Brothers* wants to be a retro-referencing modern American animation. And it succeeds, at least on a superficial level. It's well produced, and the humour is brash and crude. But where the gaming equivalent of Nickelodeon ought to be a blend of cheeky creativity and neon enthusiasm, *Floigan* is lifeless.

The action centres around two brothers, Hoigle and Moigle, and, as you might expect from something quite this characterised, interplay between the two is charming. They're warped according to cartoon cliché: Hoigle is small but cunning, and Moigle is big but pleasantly retarded. The player controls the nippy Hoigle, which means Moigle plays Tamagotchi. Feed him; teach him; play games with him; use his simple primary emotions to solve puzzles.

A puzzle game without puzzles

Except that's not how it works. Crates indicate where Moigle needs to be led to, and the state he needs to be in when he gets there. Take him there, upset him, or make him happy, and the game goes into showreel animation mode. That's as deep as the puzzle solving gets – in theory it's a quirky arcade adventure in full 3D, but in reality the player's always led by the hand. Intellectually, nothing tests, which means the title lives and dies on its minigames.

They come in two forms. The first centres around a points system intended to slow the player's progress. It costs you points to teach Moigle skills required to finish the adventure, and further points are awarded for victory in the games you play with him. This could have been a cute diversion, but ends up being crucial, meaning you have to suffer interminable rounds of drawn-out Quick Time Event gaming.

The other mini-games are similarly obligatory, either to win an object or to defeat an enemy. Some are fun once; others are relentlessly painful; two involve running fast along thin winding pipelines. That's not entertainment – it's suffering. None of the games come close to matching the animation's exuberance, and that makes *Floigan* a well-drawn failure: two-dimensional boredom and frustration distilled pure, drained into a pipette and drip, drip, dripped into your cartoon-sized eyes.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

Heavy Metal: Geomatrix

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Warning: this product contains in-game music capable of making anything heard in *Ferrari F355 Challenge* wither up and die. Granted, whether you like Megadeth and Corrosion is somewhat a matter of taste, but it does set the tone for the gameplaying experience: brash, immediate and overbearing. The format is instantly recognisable to anyone who has touched the likes of *Virtual On* through to *Powerstone*. Pick a character, enter an arena, grab as many weapons as you can and commence the slaughter.

There is absolutely nothing novel about the premise, so surely Capcom could have improved the execution. Unfortunately the inclusion of a braindead camera (which cannot be adjusted manually) contrives to deprive the game of any pleasure which might be extracted. This is a pity, because *Heavy Metal: Geomatrix* can be a good deal of fun once the control system is mastered. Power-jetting behind an adversary to take them out with a well-timed rocket launcher missile can be exhilarating; losing because the camera lazily plods around your virtual world is agonising. Though pleasurable for a short time, DC owners would be better served by *Out Trigger* (**E**101).

Edge rating: Five out of ten



Go further into the Arcade mode and you will be faced with multiple opponents. While increasing the tension and drama, chasing two enemies around screen with an erratic camera just doubles the frustration





The Chaosmatrix mode (top) offers *MGS*-like VR missions. Keys must be collected under time pressure to open exits, adding a balanced strategical element to the title

Extreme-G 3

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **In-house (Acclaim Cheltenham)** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**



The tracks are quite imaginatively designed, with plenty of roller coaster moments. It's just that, too often, things are just too twisty and narrow to allow the kind of speed you end up wishing you could engage in





Extremely solid-looking game, just not the most exciting. The sound (particularly in Dolby Surround) is excellent. A twoplayer option adds a little longevity

Technically, *Extreme-G 3* is one of the more convincing examples of PS2 software to date, with remarkably stable environments and mostly consistent framerate. Considerable attention to detail has been afforded to the spindly polygonal structures. Ultimately, this results in a convincing futuristic setting.

The premise hasn't altered radically from previous *Extreme-G* titles – you race around stomach-churning courses while attempting to gun down the opposition. Winning races not only allows progression, it also enables weapon and kit upgrades (prize money and component cost have been neatly calculated).

The handling's overly twitchy, though. Things improve once you progress to the faster league, but it never feels comfortable. Still, the game remains quite entertaining. The feeling of speed is well conveyed, but you end up wishing the track design would allow more chances to blast through the sound barrier (750mph). Combine this with somewhat unbalanced gameplay dynamics (being forced to restart a race if you leave the track springs to mind), and limited lifespan (too repetitive), and this soon becomes more of a rental, than purchase, proposition.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

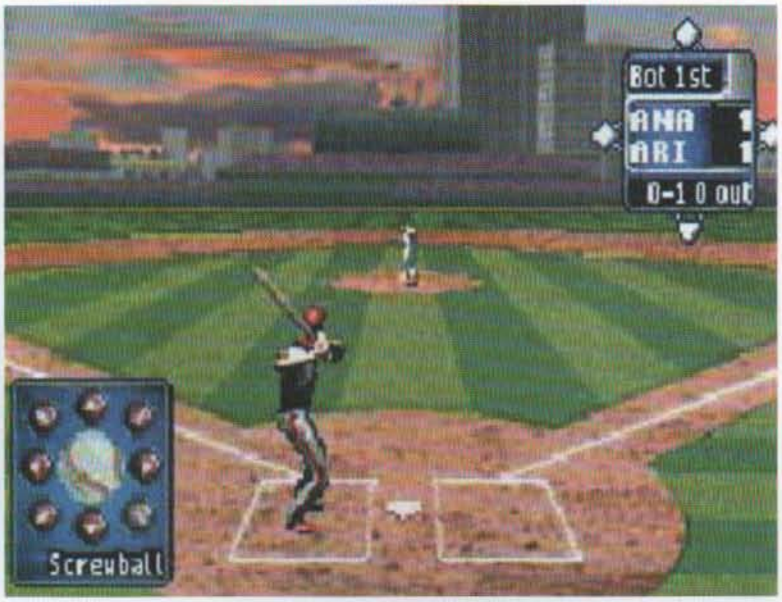
High Heat Major League Baseball 2002

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **3DO** Developer: **Möbius** Price: **£35** Release: **September 21**





The overhead view facilitates control of the fielders. The default 'auto' mode assures that your team make catches without clumsy human intervention



High Heat MLB 2002 employs the classic umpire's-eye-view for the majority of play. The game encapsulates baseball really well, but the lack of a single-cart, twoplayer option is a hideous oversight

High Heat MLB 2002 offers a fine representation o baseball. Indeed, the ostensibly two-screen actio (pitching/batting plus an overhead view of the diamonc works really well on the GBA's diminutive display.

In terms of structure, there are a variety of play options including Exhibition, Season and Play-Off modes. It features an unhealthily comprehensive array of updated teams, players and stats, and also possesses the relevant in-game controls for altering th style/direction of pitching and batting, and modifying the deployment of fielders. Certainly anyone on more than nodding terms with the sport is ably catered for, and the simple controls mean that it's just as easy to pick up – and enjoy – if you're a baseball novice.

Graphically, the game bodes well for future sporting titles: the stadia are detailed, and the precisely animated players move with realistic speed and athleticism. To its detriment, *High Heat MLB 2002* fails on the twoplayer link-up front – a huge oversight – and, sadly, it's difficult to see it making any impact in the UK. While US players can happily debate the the pros and cons of team line-up, it's hard to see UK gamers making the same emotional link.

Edge rating: Six out of te

Mech Commander II

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **FASA** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Despite contributing to a genre already bloated by mediocrity, *MechCommander II* had a genuine opportunity to shine. Developer FASA had the sound foundations of the original turn-based title to build on, plus a rich vein of ideas mined from the *BattleTech* RPG universe, all of which should have lent themselves perfectly to the makeup of a tactical strategy game of distinction. But *MechCommander II* spurns all that, and opts to dilute the title's more interesting aspects.

It's all the more frustrating to find the more innovative elements, like the configuration of mecha and the development of pilots, apparently disposable; they're unnecessary distractions, when they should have been at the core of events. Elsewhere, heavy scripting stitched into each of the oneplayer missions eats away at the title's longevity, something compounded by the lack of the now-mandatory skirmish mode.

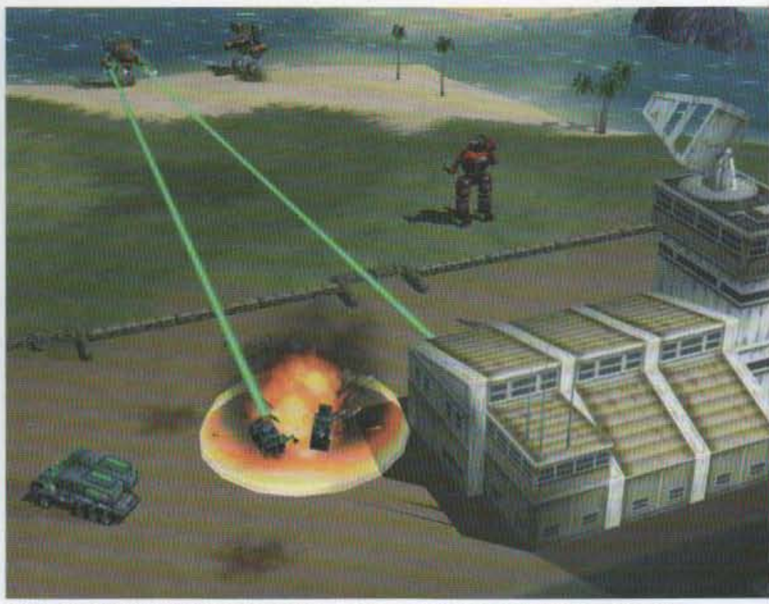
Fans of the genre may find *MechCommander II* a pleasurable dalliance, but nothing more. It offers little in the long term, and, riddled with annoyances and deficiencies, even easily satisfied strategists will notice it falls short of the benchmark titles.

Edge rating: Four out of ten





While the muddy, sparse 3D environments offer little in the way of eye candy, they still manage to gulp greedily at resources



Compared to its predecessor, the missions here are far more open-ended. In fact, much of the oneplayer campaign can be completed with total disregard for the more in-depth features of the game

The making of…
Shadowrun

Innovative gameplay: poor sales. *Shadowrun* is proof positive that even in the 'good old days' of gaming, innovation wasn't always appreciated. The title's back story is similarly illuminat as **Edge** discovers from creators **Gregg Barnett** and **Paul Ki**









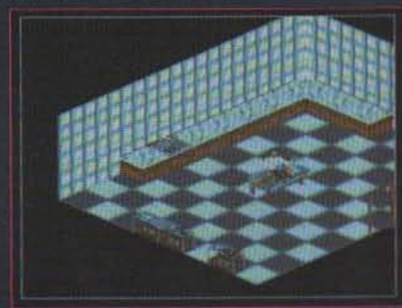


Format: **Super Nintendo**
Publisher: **Data East**
Developer: **Beam Software**
Origin: **Australia**
Original release date: **1993**

One of *Shadowrun*'s finest moments: when a doctor inadvertantly activates a 'cortex bomb' inside Jake's skull, a panicked rush ensues to find a last-minute fix













"Oh, fuck yeah! You chose the right game if you want a weird back story," blurts out *Shadowrun* co-designer **Paul Kidd** when **Edge** initially proposes an interview for a Making Of… article. "This is the game that did so well in reviews that it got me fired."

For the modest number of Super Nintendo owners who bought it – and individuals now discovering it through emulation – *Shadowrun* is one of the finest thirdparty games of the 16bit generation. Ostensibly an RPG, its character interaction, scripted events and psuedo realtime combat system made it a distinct experience. The *Deus Ex* of its generation – Warren Spector's opus appears to owe it a clear debt of gratitude – the sheer quality of its design puts many modern games to shame. What makes it still more remarkable is the story of its torrid time in development.

A pioneer during the 8bit era, Australian codeshop Beam Software became more of a common-or-garden 'hit factory' with the advent of the second console boom. **Gregg Barnett**, creator of former Making Of… favourite *Way Of The Exploding*





"I designed quite a complex combat system, where you could move your guys around like a team. If you moved into an area and were attacked, they'd scarper for cover"









Fist, was present at the company during this transition: "At Beam we were doing licensed games for the NES and SNES, and we got into a rut. The skill was making the most of what little you had with a limited brief. Every Nintendo publisher was buying any licensable property that moved. The industry didn't want to hear of anyone having an original game – only titles that involved some character, some 'product'. I was getting irritated with how the industry was going. The irony of *Shadowrun*, in many ways, is that it was symptomatic of why I wanted to leave."

When Data East acquired the licence to publish a SNES cartridge based on FASA's *Shadowrun* – a pen-and-paper RPG that appropriated its cyberpunk noir wholesale from familiar sources – Beam was appointed to fulfil coding duties, with Barnett leading the project. "I went away and spent a couple of months on an initial design," he recalls. "I remember wanting to take the RPG elements of the original and get it into a game that had an evolving storyline. FASA were very strict about how it would be presented, though – they didn't want it to stretch too far beyond their rule set. They took it extremely seriously. There was quite a bit of debate about how loose we could be."

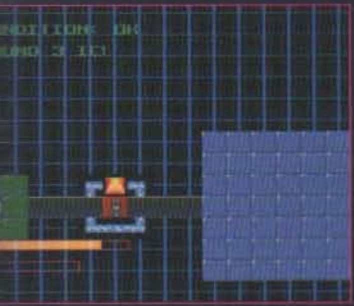
Barnett's initial vision for *Shadowrun*, tempered at times by FASA's determination to have the game remain consistent with the world it had created, differs from the final game in a number of respects. Fans who fondly recall hiring AI-controlled mercenaries for extra muscle during combat encounters may be surprised to learn that this element was originally far more involved. "I designed quite a complex combat system, where you could move your guys around like a team," reveals Barnett. "If you moved into an area and were attacked, they'd scarper for cover. You'd issue orders. It was going to be very tactical."

After sketching a rough draft of the plot, Barnett decided to leave Beam. "Gregg was doing *Shadowrun* when he went off to start his own company," says Kidd. "Because it had been Gregg's baby, for some reason no one chased it up. I thought it was actually doomed to fail. Data East came over, actually physically turned up in the building, to find out what was happening with their game. I was head of design at the time – although even the secretary was on more money than me – so they threw me in charge of *Shadowrun*. I tracked down Gregg and managed to piece all his notes together."

Kidd, understandably, was rather reluctant to work on *Shadowrun*: it was a mere seven months before deadline when he took up the reins. Worse still, his relationship with senior management at Beam was deteriorating. "With hindsight, I think it was a special kind of purgatory the boss had planned for me prior to giving me the push. I'd actually been at Beam for five years, and the bulk of my job was to come up with new stuff. I had an idea that I really wanted to do, so I took on *Shadowrun* on the understanding that I could get the wheels turning on my wonderful other game. Everyone knew that getting it done was going to be a nightmare, but that we'd get to do a great thing afterwards. The really funny thing is that I'd always hated the pretentiousness of 'cyberpunk' stuff like *Shadowrun*, too. You always get the shadowrunner standing on the rooftop, wearing shades reflecting neon lights, and a host of other clichés..."

"Gregg's design was massively over-complex, and a bit slow," Kidd continues, "but he'd left an architecture that we could work with. We kept his story, and I smoothed things over with FASA when we made changes to the design. We cannibalised sections of other games that Beam was working on at the time to get an engine in place. For example, we'd need a routine to move someone along a screen, so we'd grab the code from another game. The actual structure of it was done surprisingly quickly."

Thriving under adversity and almost entirely unsupervised, the team began to enjoy itself. One of its most radical departures from Barnett's design was the introduction of a realtime combat system. The result was a system whereby players, free to move as they please, summon a crosshair to fire weaponry and magic at opponents. Underneath this action-oriented veneer, however, *Shadowrun*'s battles owe more to turn-based designs. "We discussed both – realtime and turn-based – and I think we came up with a happy compromise," says Kidd. "We didn't want it to be too arcade.








We wanted something that an older, 'traditionalist' audience could also play."

Although the intricate (and, for the time, rather innovative) squad-based battles of Barnett's blueprint were discarded, the team retained the feature in part. The ability to hire mercenaries – controlled by simple but effective AI routines – also introduced a novel solution to a common RPG flaw: level upping. The act of fighting countless battles in order to improve your character's stats in an adventure game can be an arduous task. If your charge lacked the requisite statistics in *Shadowrun* for a particular event, you could simply employ others to compensate for his various shortcomings.

It was *Shadowrun*'s solid dialogue and use of cleverly orchestrated set-pieces, though, that made it so very compelling. It even featured events and snatches of conversation that would only occur under certain conditions, a feature that delighted completists. "I often like an environment that doesn't exist solely for the plot of the game," says Kidd. "Every character had multiple scripts, so people would respond differently in accordance with what you did earlier on the game. We were deliberately trying to do different things, to add bits that people would discover accidentally. We were all big fans of *Zelda* on the SNES. People were coming into the office after playing it all through the night. You'd go wandering through the wilderness, and you'd notice lots of things, but a new ability would make you think: 'I should go back and check that out again.' It was definitely a big influence at the time."

Shadowrun's many twists, turns and secrets – ranging from the small to the sublimely atmospheric – are far too numerous to relate here, but a few choice anecdotes spring to mind. The inclusion of telephones in certain locations allowed players to call certain characters for a conversation, removing the need to trek across a map to do so. At one point, it was possible to acquire the phone number of central protagonist Jake Armitage's nemesis, Drake. Those who found and called the number were told, once Drake became aware of their identity: "You're dead, Armitage!" *Shadowrun* was packed with such immersive and – amazingly – entirely optional moments.

One of its best set pieces involved the problem of reaching the rooftop of Drake's heavily-guarded corporate HQ. Hiring mercenaries to assist in the ensuing fracas, players had to fight their way from floor to floor, hacking computers en route. "I remember that bit vividly – the big fight through the tower block," says Kidd. "Because we didn't have the time, there was a temptation to skimp. Somehow, though, we found the time to keep adding things. There was actually a lot more that we wanted to do, but eventually we just had to say 'Enough. We've got to stop.'"

Against all odds – including the team's desire to include feature after feature – *Shadowrun* was delivered to its publisher on the due date. "It was a furious grind but, because people liked doing it, it got done on time, much to everyone's shock and amusement," says Kidd. Data East was delighted with Beam's work; Barnett, who was then working at his growing start-up in England, recalls his surprise at the end result: "I saw glowing reviews in magazines, which amazed me, given the situation and time frame."

Kidd left the company shortly afterwards and currently works as a screenwriter, while *Shadowrun*, lamentably, became a 'cult' success, rather than the hit its quality should have guaranteed; the sequel promised upon completion never materialised. Ahead of its time in so many respects, *Shadowrun* ranks alongside the likes of Looking Glass's *System Shock* as one of the most cruelly underplayed classics in videogame history. If there was ever an apposite poster child for legitimising emulation in some manner, this game is it: despite its obvious technical shortcomings compared to modern works, it remains utterly engrossing.



An example of *Shadownrun*'s 'optional' elements, players could find objects from within the game world in order to acquire spells from the 'Rat Spirit' (left). These could make Jake's life easier, but were far from mandatory

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 37, October 1996

For its first 51 issues, **Edge**'s editorial intro promised one thing: 'The future is almost here…' So, how come we're still waiting? Still, you can understand the optimism in **E**38; with artificial life on the horizon, a fine cover illustration, and – best of all – a particularly shiny ink to play with.

Those news headlines, then. M2 poised to enter the 64bit arena: Matsushita hopes to sell a million units in a year. Apple embarks on strategic gaming initiative: Pippin 'competes very well' against PlayStation and N64. And finally, John Romero to leave id Software: will set up his own development company, provisionally entitled Dream Design. Oh.

Even a six-page feature on the render-happy Square ("We're probably number one in Japan right now on the amount of money spent on SGI machines") couldn't convince that the future was any closer. It was left to the enthusiastic and gloriously optimistic **Eugene Jarvis** to provide some hope: "Right now, somewhere, there are these new guys in their garages, and they're just gonna totally blow away all these big, bloated corporations." We're still waiting.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"An interactive music adventure which explores, in a playful way, the eternal riddle of the relationship between man, woman, and nature" **Peter Gabriel** talks *Eve*

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"Few players, after all, will be used to the sensation of being rattled from behind while playing *Ridge Racer*" **Edge** cast a wry eye over the Aura Interactor

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Broken Sword (PC; 9/10); *Tunnel B1* (PS; 8/10); *Tobal No 1* (PS; 6/10); *Saturn Bomber Man* (Saturn; 7/10)



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. Tenplayer *Saturn Bomber Man* – "It doesn't exist!" claims one current **Edge** staffer 2. Eugene Jarvis smiles and awaits the revolution 3. What happens when **Edge**'s art ed goes on holiday 4. Come and have a go: Yu thinks he's hard enough at the first showing of *VF3* 5. Acclaim's 32bit conversion of *Rainbow Islands* 6. Revolution's *Broken Sword* scores a nine

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Crawfish Interactive director of development **Mike Merren** gets into a flap over *Chuckie Egg*





Chuckie Egg: as far back as his early teens, Merren couldn't get enough of the chicks

A lot of people have asked me why I chose to work in games – probably not all of them for the nicest of reasons. But, as I look back on two decades of playing games there is a game that sticks in my mind as the one that made me want to actually play games for a living: *Chuckie Egg*.

At the time I had the king of home computers, the Spectrum 48K. It's wonderful rubber keyboard brings back many a fond memory. You played an egg collector and each level would have a number of eggs you needed to collect – this would start with some fairly dumb hens that you would easily manage to avoid as you climbed and jumped your way around the chicken coop. But as you got to the more difficult levels, the hens would start to fly at you with increasingly sophisticated attack patterns. Many hours of my teens were spent trying to get to the next level. I loved the simplicity, the addictiveness, and even the frustration when a hen actually got you.

I always remember *Chuckie Egg* when looking at new games – that basically a great game isn't made by just having flashy graphics and surround sound, it needs to have something all together more difficult to produce: it needs to be fun.

FAQ

Martin Edmondson
MD, Reflections



Some industry veterans are rarely out of the industry press, forever waxing lyrical about emerging technologies and game genres. Others just keep their heads down and get on with the job in hand. Reflections MD **Martin Edmonson** falls into the latter category.

What was the first videogame you ever played?
It was Williams' *Defender* arcade game in a skating rink somewhere near Newcastle. It was amazing because of the way things exploded and all the debris flew off.

What was the first game machine you owned?
That was a BBC Micro A, which was upgraded to a B later on.

What was the first game you created?
Ravenskull on the BBC Micro, which was published by Acornsoft and Superior Software. It was a funny market, but it went on to become one of the highest selling BBC games of all time.

What's your favourite game of all time?
It has to be *Elite* simply because it's the last, or first, or most memorable time when I just couldn't wait to get home from school to play it. I've never had that since. Obviously there are games that are far superior to *Elite* in every way since then, but there was just something special about it.

What was the last game you played?
Gran Turismo 3. It's really, really good. A lot of people go on about how it's not that much different from *GT2*, but its just so finely crafted, the art is just superb. There's just nothing wrong.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
For fun? Zero. Well, when *GT3* came into the office we all jumped on that. Oh, and that *Metal Gear Solid* demo that came with *Zone Of Enders* – I played that for probably an hour.

What are your favourite book, album and film of all time?
I have to admit I don't read, so I don't have a favourite book. I don't have one favourite film, it's things like 'Usual Suspects', 'Leon', some of Michael Mann's stuff, 'Blade Runner', 'Aliens' – stuff that's got some real visual style to it. As for album, I don't really have one as I tend to buy lots of stuff and go off it really quickly.

What game would you have most liked to have worked on and why?
Colin McRae Rally. The research.

Of all the games you've been involved with, which has been your favourite and why?
Driver, as when we were doing it, it was one of those titles that you didn't know was going to be possible or not. And when it all clicked into place it was a real buzz because we were creating something different and pushing the boundaries.

What stage is your current project at?
We master sometime in the middle of January

Which aspects do you think will impress players the most?
The realism of the destruction. By the time we've finished with it, it will almost be like watching one of those videos with all the car smashes and stuff. If you get car dynamics wrong, playing the game is no fun – the car has to react as it would in a film. And I can play around with things like that for ages.

Which games are you most looking forward to and why?
GT4. I just want to see what they can do.

Which new platform are you most looking forward to?
I'm looking forward to GameCube, actually, just because I really admire the stuff Nintendo do. I remember the first time I saw *Super Mario* on the N64, you could just sit and watch it forever. They're the only hardware manufacturer that's prepared to delay a console launch to make sure one man has finished his games properly.

"I wish there were still games that came along that I would get really excited about, and want to leave work to go home and play"

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
If I were to go into an arcade today, I would look for something quite retro. I couldn't resist sticking 10p in *Defender*. Another game that really blew the socks off me was *I Robot* – it was the first 3D shaded game. It was like a weird painting game – things fragmented and blew up into pieces – it reminded me of the film 'The Last Starfighter'.

What annoys you about the industry today?
I wish there were still games that came along that I would get really excited about, and want to leave work to go home to play. I've never had that feeling back again, of the very very early days. I suppose that'll never happen again – videogames were so brand new, and there was nothing like them before. Once you get used to the industry, you lose that.

What do you enjoy most about working in the industry?
The thing that I like most about this industry is that it changes so fast, which means that it keeps fresh. So, although it doesn't instil the same boyish excitement that it did when I was younger, you just can't get bored of it – and just as you do, a new console comes along and changes all that. I like new technology – it opens your mind to what you can do.

Whose work do you most admire?
Originally, David Braben's stuff. I wasn't too impressed with the latest *Virus* games, but the first things that he did – *Elite* was obviously incredible – I couldn't get my head around how he'd got it so fast, how it was so smooth. Then *Virus* – or *Zarch* as it was on the Archimedes – I just thought was incredible. I mean, technically it was amazing, but it was also such a brilliantly designed idea – and it felt really nice to play. And I just thought that this guy is obviously incredibly clever, yet he's able to do these off-the-wall game designs. And another one is Geoff Crammond with *Sentinel* – I mean where do you start with an idea like that? He must have been on something when he thought of that. But it was great.

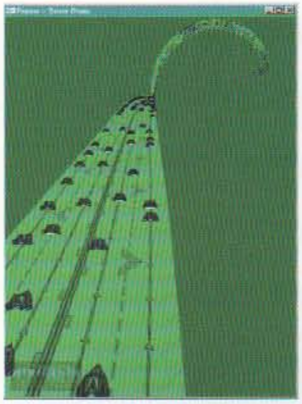
What are your thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
I think it's rubbish. Absolutely useless.

Just add intelligence

Mindlathe's *Pensor* AI engine will enable developers to create deeper, more intelligent games

Ian Millington, managing director, Mindlathe





Using level-of-detail code, this demo shows 2,000 vehicles obeying road laws at 60fps

URL
www.mindlathe.com



Formed out of the artificial intelligence research department at Birmingham University, the cerebral founders of Mindlathe could have gone into the City to predict upheavals in the stock exchange. But, as managing director **Ian Millington** points out, 'games are more fun'. They're also hard work, as the team has demonstrated over the past 12 months in which it has been working on its AI engine, *Pensor*.

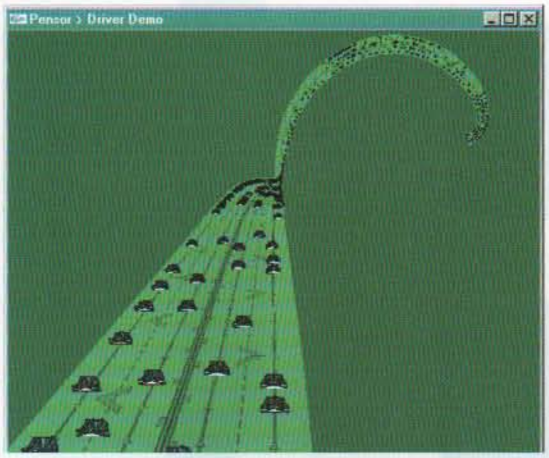
"One of the key things we are offering is prebuilt algorithms for controlling agents in terms of flocking behaviour and robust pathfinding," explains Millington. The engine consists of six basic planning components, each of which provides different trade-offs in terms of memory overhead, speed and robustness. Currently available for PC and Xbox, a PlayStation2 version is expected within six months.

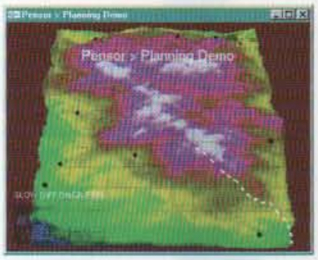
"Most applications aren't going to be best served by a monolithic solution, so we have worked out the basic trade-offs for developers," Millington says. Mindlathe's other focus is ensuring a high level of support for its clients. "When you are working with a good middleware company, it should act as an extension of your team," he explains.

And while support is important for middleware, it has particular relevance for AI. Generally, programmers can muddle through problems with rendering and physics engines – after all, these are the building blocks of most games. AI is a bit more exotic, however.

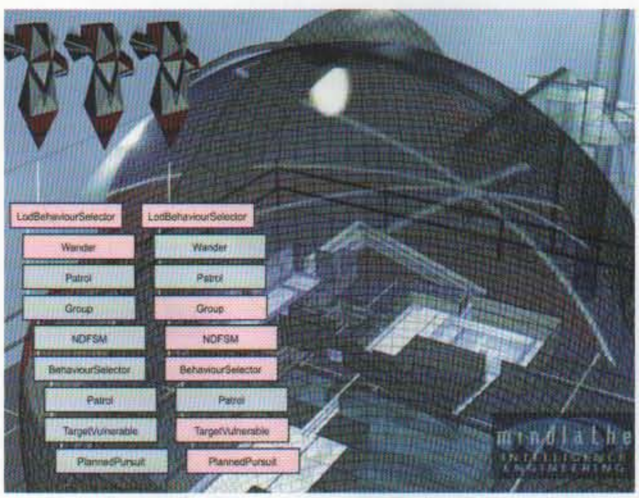
"Our number one priority is support, because AI isn't graphics or physics and so isn't as widely known," Millington says. With this in mind, *Pensor's* launch in late September will be strictly controlled, with only half a dozen licences being offered initially.

As Millington is at pains to point out, though, *Pensor* isn't necessarily tricky to use. "Developers are used to doing things such as building state machines so they will be able to get something going straight out the box," he says. "But, as a company, our emphasis is helping people get really creative and use more complex algorithms such as expert system shells. We want to make sure our customers get the knowledge, not just the code."





Pathfinding is the most common use of AI. *Pensor*'s planning routines can be spread over frames so heavy AI tasks don't result in a drop in framerate



Steering behaviours can be easily combined to create basic AI requirements using the *Pensor* interface. However, only a dozen licences will be available at the outset

Deep thought in action

There are three low-level technology demos of *Pensor's* abilities. The first shows simple steering behaviours using a representation of the British Bulldog tagging game, Ian Millington explains, as a wave of coloured dots is chased across the screen by some differently coloured dots: "We've got tagging, seeking and pursuing behaviours, as well as controls to get the catchers to move in formation to circle the prey."

In programming terms, the steering components are simply dragged and dropped. They can be parameterised as well. "We have some neat crossovers so you can steer them into other objects that have been created by state machines," Millington continues.

The second example shows around 2,000 vehicle AI sets running simultaneously. "Each of them is reacting to objects around and behind them and speeding up, slowing down and changing lanes," says Millington. "One of the advantages of the scene graph approach we use for *Pensor* is that we can play with things such as level of detail."

The biggest use of AI in games is pathfinding and planning. The final demo shows an agent plotting a course across a 1,000 by 1,000 terrain grid. "The task is to get from one side of the grid to the other in the shortest possible distance," says Millington. There are three other parameters which also influence the path. "The agents minimise going up and down steep gradients, they try to avoid any enemy bases and because they have line of sight ability, they try to minimise their exposure on ridges as well," he says. And because the planning engine is interruptable, developers can run multiple agents at the same time, pausing the pathfinding every frame to render the scene.

The tao of Tao

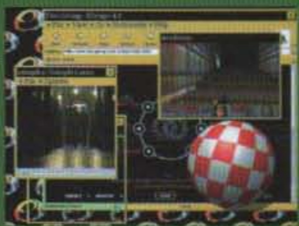
Tao Group's super-fast, super-portable Intent platform is finally making waves



Francis Charig, chairman, Tao Group







Transparency effects and alpha blending are some of the inherent capabilities of Tao's Intent platform

Despite the fact that the first consumer product to use Tao's virtual Java machine, Intent, is about to ship in Japan, chairman **Francis Charig** has a bone to pick.

"A while back **Edge** said that Tao was dead," he accuses. Well, these things happen, but there have been nine long and seemingly barren years for the company, formed by Charig and game developer Chris Hinsley back in 1992. Initially established when Hinsley, whose game credits include *Onslaught* and *Pyjamarama*, started considering a better way to port content between platforms, its time has arrived.

"I think we're about to become one of those overnight success stories which has taken a decade," confides Charig. But, as he is at pains to stress, a great deal of time and effort is needed to crack the Japanese consumer electronics market, and that's exactly what Tao has done. More striking still is the news that companies such as JVC, Sharp, Bandai, Taito and Sega have come together to form the Open Contents Platform Association to standardise devices such as mobile phones, PDAs, digital cameras and Web tablets using Tao's Intent platform as a core.

"You have to think about the problems our technology is resolving," explains Charig. "There are problems for network operators, there are problems for manufacturers and there are problems for content developers. The operators have to deliver premium data services because of their huge 3G licence debts, manufacturers have a range of connected devices to which they want to add value-added technologies and get to market as quickly as possible, while content developers are limited by the performance of these devices. It makes sense for them to take the one technology that could open up opportunities that are being denied to them at present."



Intent demonstrates its multimedia performance by maintaining a high framerate even with multiple windows active. As well as *Doom*, the open source version of *Quake* has also been ported over to it

Simply put, Intent is a highly optimised platform designed for low-power applications. Being language-independent, developers can write applications for it in anything from Java to C++, or even scripting languages. This then compiles down to a portable binary which can run on as many systems as Intent supports. It runs on most things, including all flavours of *Windows* and Linux, and on processors as low-end as the Z80.

"Just as chip designer ARM has its own 32bit RISC-based microprocessor, so we have our own 32bit RISC-based microprocessor, with our own assembler and disassembler and software stack," says Charig. "The difference is that ARM's chips exists in silicon and ours is virtual."

It's a clever piece of technology, but the real selling point – at least as far as developers will be concerned – is Intent's performance. Without speed, portability is nothing. "Even if you code in Java, content will run 10 to 40 times faster than the nearest competition," he boasts.

Which should be good news for developers and consumers alike. It's certainly good news for Tao. "There are a lot of key product wins happening now," Charig says. "You will see a lot of products using Intent moving onto the market in 2002, and I think that 2003 will be the start of a golden age for the company." Where Tao's concerned, at least, good things come to those who wait.

URL
www.tao-group.com

Extending the range

As with all good platforms, Tao has been keen to build up a set of preferred technology partners to add further features to Intent. Criterion's *RenderWare* is the preferred graphics engine, although, as Francis Charig points out, decent 3D performance relies on devices having specific hardware support. *MathEngine* is another familiar name from the game middleware arena, while audio capabilities are provided by *SSEYO*. "Criterion is a key partner for us, but we are an open platform – so if someone like WildTangent want to plug into Intent, then obviously it can," Charig says. "Our product is an infrastructure which allows companies to value add so we are not going to deny people the ability to provide that value."

Heart of the system

Intel maintains that CPUs still matter to developers and gamers as it presents a souped-up Pentium 4

Jean Claud Cottier
senior 3D programmer, Lionhead





Intel expects to break the 2GHz barrier with the Pentium 4 before 2002

Since NVidia started releasing its GeForce range of graphics chips, gamers have shifted the focus of their overclocking activities to graphics processing units, as opposed to central processing units (CPUs). No wonder Intel's launch of the Pentium 4 was viewed as a non-event. But, locked in a bitter battle with AMD, Intel is fighting back.

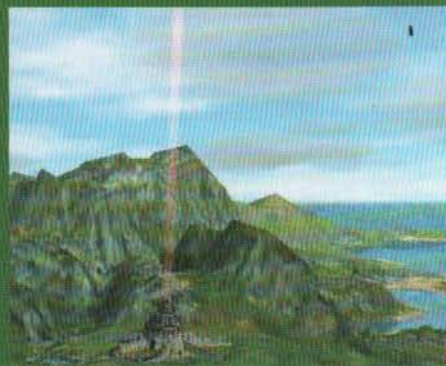
According to Intel applications engineer **Alex Klimovitski**, CPU speed matters because a well-balanced PC will always offer the best graphics performance. "At the recent Microsoft Meltdown, Rage demonstrated that by distributing the 3D visualisation tasks between a 1.5GHz Pentium 4 CPU and a GeForce 3 graphics card, it could achieve between 30 and 50 per cent better performance compared to exercising the card alone," he explains. "Given two fast processors inside a PC, the way to get the best performance is to let them work in parallel. The notion that a fast graphics card is an alternative to a fast CPU is a misconception." Intel expects to start shipping 2GHz P4s before the end of the year.

One of the underlying reasons for this massive jump in clockspeed is that the structure of the Pentium 4 has been overhauled compared to its predecessors. Using the NetBurst micro-architecture, Intel has focussed on getting its chips' speed as high as possible rather than trying to maximise the number of instructions per cycle (IPC). Overall chip performance is gauged by the multiplication of IPC and clockspeed.

One of the reasons it has been able to take this approach is the further application of its Single Instruction, Multiple Data technology. First implemented in the less-than-well-regarded MMX multimedia extensions, the Pentium 4 now allows developers to use second-generation Streaming SIMD Extensions (SSE2). This fast software pipeline can apply a single, high-precision, 128bit operation to four data sets at once.

"Games require intensive floating-point and integer calculations as well as conversions between the two. SSE/SSE2 was designed to improve performance in all three areas," says Klimovitski. Intel is beefing up its developer relations to encourage programmers to take advantage of the performance offered by SSE/SSE2, as well as its VTune Analyser. This tool discovers inefficiencies in application code, allowing developers to concentrate on hot spots. Studios such as Lionhead are also releasing optimised P4 game code in order to showcase the technologies.

URL
http://developer.intel.com/design/pentium4





Compared to the standard version of *Black & White* (top), the P4 optimisation code handles more geometry, more texture information and has a longer draw distance. The result is a much smoother looking game (above)



Intel is pushing the benefits for consumers of the Pentium 4 by completing deals with developers such as Lionhead to release enhanced custom content of their PC games

Eden reclaimed

"When we started working with Intel they sent us two Pentium 4s, which we used to run *Black & White* in debug mode. It was almost as fast as the release version of the game running on a Pentium 3, which was very impressive. We thought surely we can do something with this," says **Jean-Claud Cottier**, Lionhead's senior 3D programmer.

Shipped within the latest patch, the P4 optimised *Black & White* may not look a great improvement in terms of comparison screenshots, but when you are zooming around Eden, it does have a big effect. Whereas without optimisation textures pop from low to high res while mountainous ridges rise and fall depending on the graphic load, the game is far smoother with optimisation.

"We wanted to do something special for the P4, so we made the game run much faster even with more geometry on screen and a longer draw distance," says Cottier. "This is one of the hardest levels to deal with as there are lots of mountains, and previously we had to make compromises. With the P4, though, there is no more popping or artifacts, and using SSE2 we can almost transform all our vertices in one go. It is not quite four times faster than before, but nearly."

Lionhead gained performance using VTune as well. "We found we had one instruction to convert a floating point number to an integer that was taking up 10 per cent of the CPU. This function is well known to be slow, so Intel developed a fast optimised version for P4, and by using that we got almost 10 per cent gain in CPU performance," he reveals.

Something to talk about

Microsoft's Game Voice technology is adding an new dimension to online PC games

John Selbie, lead software developer, Game Voice



Microsoft



The freeshare version of Game Voice provides limited functionality for users but can be shipped on game CDs

Microsoft has been pushing voice communication for online games since it bought Canadian company Battlecom and slipped the technology into the DirectX API. A hardware launch of its SideWinder Game Voice part followed last year. Retailing at $55 (£39), the hardware consists of an eight-button puck to control up to four voice channels, and an integrated headphone/microphone headset.

Four levels of CODEC ensure that the quality of communication scales from 33.6Kbps modem connections to cable modems, and LANs. Management of online sessions is built around the MSN Messenger Service, which enables people to use their buddy lists and see if friends are online. In addition to online communications the software includes a Lernout & Hauspie speech recognition engine, so users have access to up to 30 voice commands to augment the usual keyboard controls.

Big in Germany, thanks to the strength of the RTS scene there, the Game Voice team has been refining the technology and is about to begin a fresh drive to get more developers to support it. "We've just released version 1.5 of Game Voice, which is the first to go through a full Microsoft consumer test program. We expect to release version 1.6 of the software towards the end of 2001, too," explains **John Selbie**, Game Voice's lead software developer.

Key to getting more consumers onboard is the availability of a free version of the software, called Game Voice Share. Limited in functionality compared with the hardware version, it has clocked up 500,000 downloads since launch. Crucially, the share version can also be shipped with retail games to provide basic online chat capabilities. "In the past year about 20 PC titles shipped with Game Voice Share on the CD," says **John Dongelmans**, SideWinder evangelist. "It's the easiest way to add voice to games, and it is free. Developers can just put the Game Voice share bits in a goodies folder and refer to them in the set-up."

Dongelmans is keen to persuade developers to fully use the capabilities of the hardware version as well. "We are refocusing our evangelism efforts on custom voice chat integration," he says. "We recommend the Direct Play Voice SDK for the game developers who are looking for real tight voice integration. In the last couple of months we have talked to a lot of game developers and almost all of them are super excited about adding voice to their upcoming titles." Marketing the hardware is the top priority for the SideWinder team, and Microsoft is considering co-marketing deals with titles that it considers to be really pushing the envelope. It won't comment on rumours that the technology will migrate to Xbox, though.

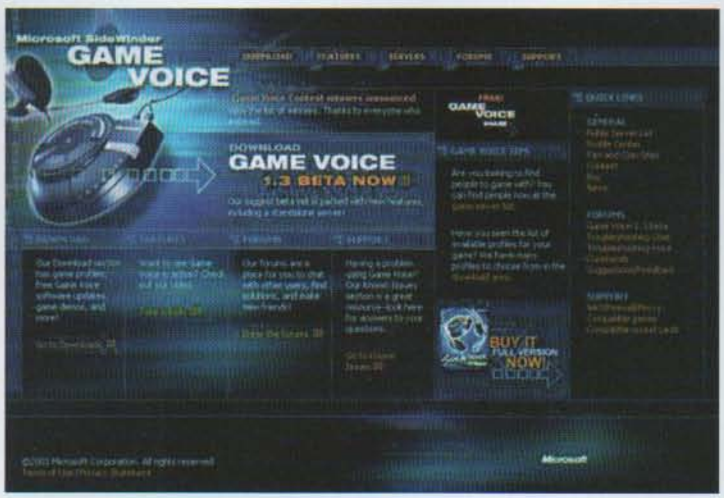


The hardware version of Game Voice contains an eight-button puck for controlling channels and an integrated headphone/microphone set

As for the future, Selbie is looking to implement better channel management and voice morphing abilities into the next release. "We listen to feedback from current users and game developers," he says. "They can contact us at gvsdk@microsoft.com if they are interested in getting us to support new features."



Using MSN Messenger as a foundation, users can easily check the status of the members of their buddylist





Players can use up to 30 voice commands in-game, thanks to the voice recognition engine. Game Voice can be configured to handle bandwidth ranging from 33.6Kbps modems to LANs

URL
www.gamevoice.com

Diary of a videogame

Looking for a way into the industry? Why not become a tester?

Elixir diary, part 28
by designer Joe McDonagh









Elixir's QA manager Ed Valiente (top) has a dream: that *Republic: The Revolution* will be patch free. Stop that laughing at the back immediately

Testing, like 'running' in the film industry, is the most common way for non-technical people to get into the games industry. Many excellent people have been testers, notably the likes of Alex Garden, the founder of Relic and *Homeworld*'s designer, who started as a tester at EA. It's also one of the toughest and certainly least glamorous roles in development, a brutal reality check for even the most misty eyed of gaming romantics. The job, in principle at least, is simple: identify and chart the deluge of bugs that plague the last months of every game's development. In practice, this is a mind-numbing task that requires endless patience and anally retentively high levels of attention to detail. **Ed Valiente**, Elixir's QA manager, discusses his experiences as a tester in the industry and what qualities are required to succeed:

I joined the industry in August 1997, starting with Sony's Liverpool studio. I'd graduated with a gentleman's third in Social and Political Sciences from Cambridge University and was at a crossroads. Given the correlation between my degree result and the amount of time I'd spent playing games, I thought I might try and turn this investment of several thousand hours into something useful. It seemed logical to get a job in the industry.

Doing so was tough; the industry is largely a closed shop. There are limited ways in for people who don't possess programming or art skills. I spotted an advert for QA testers at SCEE Liverpool in **Edge** and applied for a job. My perseverance was rewarded and I got in. I was soon disabused of my laughably naïve views on the nature of testing games for a living. Despite perceptions of the job and endless jokes about sore thumbs, it's very tough. I was there for 18 months, during which time I worked on *Gran Turismo*, *TOCA*, *G-Police*, *ISS* and *Tekken 3*, amongst others. In December 1998 I moved to Square Europe to set up the European production department, incorporating QA, localisation and customer/Web support. There I worked on *Final Fantasy VIII*, *IX*, *X* and *XI*, as well games like *Vagrant Story*, *Parasite Eve 2* and *The Bouncer*.

A good tester has several important qualities. Patience is one of them. The majority of games aren't very good, and, despite this, a tester must be willing to put the hours in on a title that will in all likelihood disappear without trace. The ability to communicate clearly and diplomatically is another critical skill. A recent post mortem of one of the year's biggest games revealed that they'd had to fix 3,000 bugs in six weeks. During this period tired programmers breathe, eat and sleep with their machines. They work day and night to fix a seemingly endless mountain of problems. A visit from a tester feels like a visit from Hary Enfield's 'Only me!' character. As you can imagine, the greeting rarely involves a nice cuppa and an invitation to share some biscuits.

"In principle the job is simple: identify and chart the deluge of bugs that plague the last months of development. In practice, this is a mind-numbing task"

Clear, constructive bug reporting is another crucial skill. Writing a bug report that says 'The game crashed' without giving any further information isn't terribly helpful. Writing that 'The character looks stupid' is unlikely to endear you to the development team. Good testers understand the nature of bug testing and report in a manner that will facilitate quick solutions. Because of this, it is an ideal training ground for aspiring game developers. Many that survive the fierce demands of the job go on to greater things, inured. Unsurprisingly the determination required to survive the experience stands you in good stead.

As for this project, I am very much aiming for a patch-free *Republic*. To achieve this, I am working on a coherent system which hopefully surmounts the everyday problems encountered in videogame QA. A serious industry such as ours ought to treat each aspect in a professional manner, and there is much we can learn from application testing carried out by corporate software industry.

That few development studios have internal QA department baffles me. Instead, programmers are often responsible for checking the functionality of their own code and then relying on publishers to begin the 'monkey testing'.

Having an internal QA department team enables the team to release new versions to the testers, who can identify key issues before a title is sent to the publisher. When the publisher is thousands of miles from the developer, this can save valuable time. Given the paucity of communication which can exist between publisher and developer, this can also greatly reduce the number of duplicate bugs, which is another important timesaving tool.

A good example of this occurred when I was carrying out the localisation testing for *Gran Turismo*. Schedules were tight and bugs were plentiful. In a final push to check all text, 24-hour weekend shift work was introduced.

Translators were only given vague character length restrictions, which meant that when the text was implemented in the code a sizeable proportion of menu text was off-screen or overlapping. Late on a Sunday night the testers handed me hundreds of bug sheets. All we could do was wait for the new version. Imagine my dismay when hours later a new version arrived, minus the aforementioned problems. The Japanese QA team had noticed the same thing and the dev team had burnt a new version with a smaller font – but no one had told us. So, all those days and nights of frantic testing were wasted.

Does this justify the initial assertion, or contradict it?

inbox

Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

Why are Sony releasing a hard disk for the PS2. Firstly add-ons don't work, they never have. The Famicom disc drive, the Mega CD, the 32X, the JagCD, the M2, the 64DD, the list goes on – they all bombed. If it's not built into the box it will never have proper support. If it's not properly supported, no one wants one. It's simple, really.

Secondly, while a hard disk may offer some interesting gaming innovations, I doubt Sony has the talent to make use of it. Since Xbox started this fashion with console hard disks, the only use I have seen mentioned is that of patches, and that is a terrible road to go down.

Do Sony want a console or a PC anyway? Maybe in Japan it might prove mildly popular, but in the west we have PCs to do PC things on. The PS2 does not need a mouse, a keyboard, or a hard disk. What's more important today, four joypad ports or a keyboard? What does the PS2 have? I rest my case.

Multimedia doesn't work. It didn't work for the CDTV, the CD-i, the 3DO, the NEC FX. Gamesplayers want games machines. The only thing the PS2 should do is play console games; Sony should concentrate on this instead of messing around with the PS2 vision as a singing and dancing multimedia digital gateway of the future.

Nintendo seem to have the right idea. A small, powerful, easy to develop for games console for gamesplayers. Now, if only they could rediscover their thirdparty relations of the SNES era and actually make sure it has a wide catalogue of titles. OK, a lot of the PlayStation games are dross, but don't forget the SNES hosted drivel too. It's all very well being high and mighty about quality, but it didn't get the N64 very far. Get your act together Nintendo, go and get Capcom, Namco, Konami, EA and Sega onboard, and let's not repeat our mistakes of the past.

Chris Wright, via email

To dismiss the PS2 hard drive before anyone has even scratched the surface of its potential is a little premature. Certainly **Edge** has worries concerning the 'patch' mentality it could generate among publishers, but the possibilities – seamless level transitions, face-mapping, instant replays, realistic (and timely) commentating – are equally appealing.

Oh, and M2 was a standalone, next-generation 3DO machine, not an add-on.

I was recently flicking through some of my back issues of **Edge** when I came across your interview with Ron Gilbert concerning *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. This got me thinking that **Edge** should consider adding an Adventure Game Retrospective to its To Do list of articles, supplements and features.

Some 90 per cent of all games today use 3D graphics, even when producing sequels to 2D games. I personally believe it was a mistake for *Monkey Island 4* to be in 3D, as it almost seems embarrassed to be associated with the genre which made it successful.

LucasArts is now more famous for producing 'Star Wars' spin-offs than its original adventure games, while Sierra has its new 'darling' in the form of the *Half-Life* saga, as opposed to the likes of *Kings Quest*, *Space Quest*, and good old *Larry*.

In the past, a number of articles in **Edge** have focused on fan-created levels for *Quake* and *Unreal*, using level editors available on the Internet or with the games. What hasn't been mentioned is the rise in fan-based adventure game engines such as *SCRAMM*, *AGHAST* and Chris Jones' *Adventure Game Studio*. What about Web sites such as mixnmojo.com and adventuredeveloper.com, which help keep the genre alive.

Surely as this genre goes through an Internet renaissance, we are going to see a rise in game designers with scripting, sprite animation and puzzle creation skills, as opposed to the current 'deathmatch' creators?

The criticism that adventure games are too expensive to create seems to pale when you see how much it costs to license the *Quake III Arena* engine, or film extensive Mark Hamill-starring cut scenes. Adventure games requiring less 'bleeding edge' specs for PCs in particular allow for a wider audience to enjoy them.

A good game is more than a series of fantastic graphics. Let's remember the days when a game was praised for good plots, clever scripts and puzzles, and not for the number of textured, bump-mapped polygons it displayed per frame. It wasn't that long ago.

Matt Goble, via email

A retrospective on the adventure genre might be of interest. However, your final paragraph could be describing a whole host of recent releases, such as *Majora's Mask*, *Code: Veronica* or *Deus Ex* – games in which the power of the visuals only serve to heighten the overall experience.

I would just like to mention that the DVDRegionX from us here at Datel does remove the green problem from the PS2. You will find it on page 16 of issue 100.

Damon Barwin, Datel D&D, via email

In E100 Usman Zia talked about the PS2 analogue buttons. I would like to say that on the



Enough of the FPS MOD community, argues Matt Goble. How about highlighting the flourishing adventure game scene in an **Edge** feature?



A global industry such as videogaming should address a global market, so why no music of black origin in *GT3*, wonders Chizo Ejindu

PS2 pad they are pointless or do not work. I came to this conclusion while playing *GT3*. Now, I applied gentle pressure to all the buttons to see if I could get an increment of movement, but the R1, R2, L1 and L2 buttons responded digitally in an on/off manner – could you check out my claim and expose certain claimers for promoting the feature? This feature, however, works on the DC trigger buttons, and I feel Usman would have noticed their benefits if he were playing *GT3* using a DC pad.
Solomon Temowo, via email.
The analogue manner of the PS2 pad is, indeed, overstated: although the R, L and fire buttons all generate a feedback value of between 0 and 255, the minimal travel distance afforded the buttons makes it almost impossible to apply a useable degree of control.

Having read the 'Prophets' article, it amazes me that one very obviously salient development in computer game creation has been missed out completely. That is, the decline of the game developer.

Completely unthinkable, perhaps, but then that is why they call the future 'unknown'. It is my belief that the next technological revolution in computer gaming will not be one of front-end console crunch wars and an ever-more-impressed public. The public have already hit a certain zenith of being impressed, and the days of the great revolution (16 to 64bits) are well and truly consolidated. As the tech continues to advance, the more meaningless it all becomes.

No, the next revolution is the back-end. It is the development of tools that remove the need for games developers from the process of games creation. It's like a grand-scale version of Web development. Few are the people that code HTML any more. They all use *Dreamweaver* or *Frontpage*. Neither of these tools is perfect, so you do have to dig into the HTML at some points. But the tools do make Web page production vastly more efficient, and place page creation firmly in the hands of designers.

That is where the future of gaming lies. Designer-driven content, with artists, writers, designers and editors directly building the games on the new platforms. Designer-driven content built on platform tools that slash the development costs and times for games. Occasionally the designers will need to code, and perhaps each studio will have a solitary bug-fixing developer remembering the purist yesteryear.

The next generation of gaming will experience a cultural revolution brought on by trendy designer culture instead of the relatively conservative developer culture. Future games will be hip, postmodern, post-zeitgeist, third millennial exercises in cool, built by artists instead of engineers.

That is when games will finally escape the sword, sorcery, tits and ass, racecars, rocket launchers and spaceships that currently comprise 'gamer culture'. And about time, too.
Tadhg Kelly, via email
An intriguing proposition. However, **Edge** will, for one, miss the racecars, rocket launchers and tits and ass aspect of gamer culture.

I am a 17 year gaming veteran. Nothing unusual there. I am black. Nothing unusual there, either. In fact, I'm sure a sizeable minority of the gaming populace of the planet is black. So why is it that black artists and music are generally conspicuous by their absence from most, if not all, triple-A titles?

Before you all get up-in-arms, I will say that you can find the odd hip-hop track in some titles (*NBA Street*, for example), but generally it's Brit rock, house etc. Take *GT3*, for example, a triple-A title bar none. The music credits are a who's who of the latest indie – Feeder, Ash, Death in Vegas etc. Would it hurt to include, say, Nelly or Janet Jackson in the mix? Or if they have to be local, how about Craig David, Wookie, Lydon David Hall, or Oxide & Neutrino to name a few? And it's not as if this music is only bought and listened to by the black community. Do you not think that in this day and age of globalisation we could actually go global with in-game music?

The answer to that question, for the moment, will be no. Why? All I will say is, look at the upper echelons of power in the games industry. I bought **E**100 and read the comments about the future from the various gaming gurus you interviewed. Only one question – how many of them were not white or Japanese?

I apologise if you find my views racist or otherwise skewed. However, as far as I am concerned a global industry should address a global market. Videogaming does not.
Chizo Ejindu, via email
The lack of representation of ethnic minorities and females in games can only be addressed by the development community. **Edge** intends delving into this subject in greater detail in a future issue.

I know people call for a more adult approach from Nintendo, but what exactly is Luigi doing behind Mario on **Edge** 100's cover – a spot of plumbing? And them being brothers as well...
PJaggers, via email

'I know people call for a more adult approach from Nintendo, but what exactly is Luigi doing behind Mario on **Edge** 100's cover? A spot of plumbing?'



Miyamoto strikes again, converting a 50-year-old to the joys of modern-day videogaming, and inducing a renewed lust for life in the process

Luigi is attempting to suck Mario's hat off with a vacuum cleaner. Any other message implied is purely at the discretion of the viewer.

I read with interest your article on the Games Cultures conference in Bristol. It would be nice to see more coverage of academic appraisals of videogames in **Edge**. I realise that you are an industry orientated magazine, but I feel there are too many long boring interviews with codeshops and too little on the aesthetic qualities of games.

Steven Poole's column is a good start. His book, although flawed, is a long-needed attempt to start to take gaming seriously. It's ridiculous when you look at the millions of books on films, TV news and soap operas that such a large, complicated industry is utterly ignored. After all, as you point out, games have similarities to many different media and can be studied in the same ways, but also have elements that are completely different which require whole new frameworks of thought.

But it is not just videogames that are ignored. Despite the 'game' being a central part of culture and everyday life – in sport, lotteries, boardgames, toys (and that's not to even think about how 'game playing' is a integral part of all our social interactions) – there is almost no academic work on the subject. It's about time we started to think of 'games' as having just a central role in our lives as 'narratives'.

So, in short, more information and coverage please, even if it is only links and references to where we can find out more.

Lee Cheshire, via email

PS Surely the term 'ludology' derives from ludus, Latin for 'play', not the boardgame Ludo, as you state. (Ludo is actually Latin for 'I play'.)

Whenever I unwrap a new copy of **Edge** I flick straight to the reviews and read usually only about two, picked by a refined selection process: any game with less than a seven I scan the pictures and title, then ignore.

I'll only really consider reading a seven or eight scored game if it's on my favourite platforms, or takes any of my particular fancies. I trust **Edge**'s summation skills that much. I've also realised that I've been reading fewer reviews recently. In the last issue of Edge I read none thoroughly – I don't feel like I've missed anything.

Joe, via email

Hopefully, this is merely a reflection on the lacklustre state of the games market, not on **Edge**'s reviewing skills...

Back in 1998 I was diagnosed with testicular and abdominal cancer. I was 50 years old. At about this time, my son suggested that I try having a go on his games console (Nintendo 64) to help while away the long periods of inactivity during my various treatments.

Now, I freely admit that I saw his idea as idiotic and told him there was no way on earth I would waste my time with that rubbish. I told him I would rather do something useful like read a novel or rekindle my interest in painting. The game my son introduced me to was *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. I watched him (sceptically) as he demonstrated his own game, and this initial observation involved just watching him wandering around the central field area (Hyrule). I was immediately amazed at the scale and vastness of the created world.

I instinctively knew then that I was experiencing something new; something I had never really seen before. So, drawn in on this aesthetic level, I agreed to try it for myself. Initially I weathered some ridicule for my basic ineptness, but I soon realised that I could learn this at my own pace. I was able to learn in a gentle, non-threatening way, and after a few tries I suppose I was hooked.

My ability as a gameplayer went from general incompetence to a level of assuredness that astonished me (and my son). My point here is to express an amazing transformation that took place in me. Playing *Zelda* gave me a new sense of determination and strength in that I could do all the things denied me in reality – like running around, climbing and interacting with my world. Simple things we all take for granted. I truly believe that this game got me through the very worst of my illness.

I now preach the merits of computer gaming to my own sceptical friends and have been thanked sincerely from other 'converts' who have also been ill. I have experienced an education here. I went from seeing the games industry and its members as slightly absurd, to realising it was me that had it wrong all along. I never knew of the levels of sophistication and personal involvement that could be generated sat in front of a television playing games. I am now well into a whole slew of new titles, and cannot imagine what being ill would be like without this escape.

So, to anyone out there who felt as I did: try it for yourself. You might also find a new zest for life, too.

Michael Pratt, via email

We're happy that you have, albeit belatedly, discovered the manifold joys of gaming – it's just a shame that you had to suffer a severe illness before doing so.

Steven Poole makes an exceptionally

'Playing *Zelda* gave me a new sense of determination and strength in that I could do all the things denied to me in reality – like running around and interacting with my world'



Robert Knowles-Leak suspects **Edge** of 'historical revisionism'. The subject: cel shading, and the great *Jet Set Radio/Wacky Races* affair

good point regarding the almost rabid quest for photorealistic graphics in games. His comments remind me very much of the transition between versions *4* and *5* of Microsoft's *Flight Simulator*.

The scenery in version *4* was composed of simple polygons and a limited colour palette. Version *5* replaced this with 'photorealistic' graphics that could be more accurately defined as a 'shimmering mass of textured garbage'. In fact, the graphics were so shockingly bad that I questioned the sanity of the programmers.

This one example demonstrates that the quest for photorealism isn't without its pitfalls. The graphics in version *4* may have been very basic by today's standards, but at least they were uncluttered. Replacing these crisp, clear visuals with what I consider to be some of the worst graphics ever designed for a computer game, all for the sake of 'photorealism', was something that the entire industry can well do without.

Chris Low, via email

Photorealism has its place – the likes of *GT3* and *The Getaway* are testament to that – but it does seem odd that the creative freedom provided by computer-generated imaging drives us to simply recreate the mundanities of the real world – badly, in the case of *Flight Simulator 4*.

I am beginning to suspect **Edge** of historical revisionism. Forgive me if I am wrong, but I am convinced that the first game (released in the UK at least) to use cel shading techniques was *Wacky Races* on the Dreamcast.

I definitely played this game before *Jet Set Radio* was released here. Is **Edge** guilty of biasing its history in the favour of the gameplay victor, or is it using some different measure of time than the release dates of the games it talks about?

Robert Knowles-Leak, via email

You may well have played *Wacky Races* first in the UK, but *Jet Set Radio* beat it to market in Japan by about four months. So, our claim stands.

I like the **Edge** marking scheme the way it is. If **Edge** gave very good game nine out of ten, then how would we be able to tell the exceptional games apart from those that were just good? When I see a game in **Edge** with seven out of ten, I know this game has something to offer – it doesn't need to have a blinding score and a review with lots of exclamation marks.

Under the current scheme, when I see a score of nine I know I'm looking at something that is above and beyond most games out there, whereas with other magazines that hand out 95 per cent to several games a month, 95 per cent doesn't mean the game is anything special.

I think part of the problem is that people see numbers in scores as an absolute. Not so, the number only represents a class of games that have been associated in the past; this is, after all, a subjective review and not a scientific process. So, if we start giving more mediocre games seven out of ten, then seven will come to mean mediocre.

The **Edge** rating scheme shows a healthy level of maturity, that I think comes through in the whole magazine (which is, indeed, why I buy it).

Michael Dales, via email

Already the, shall we say 'relaxed', reviewing systems of other magazines have resulted in seven being viewed as an average mark by many games publishers. Despite the tongue-lashing **Edge** often receives as a consequence of its realistic reviewing policy, we won't be changing any time soon.

> 'Forgive me if I am wrong, but I am convinced that the first game (released in the UK, at least) to use cel shading was *Wacky Races* on the Dreamcast'

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Topic: **Should Edge really cover the GBA?**
Poster: **Hawksmoor**

Given that **Edge**'s tagline has always been 'the future of electronic entertainment', should it really cover the GBA seeing as it uses 32bit technology and its games don't show signs of offering new experiences? Or can any new equipment, no matter how old the technology that it uses is, be counted if it's another way of playing games? Where should the line be drawn?

Topic: **Should Edge really cover the GBA?**
Poster: **smackdee**

The problem with lauding yourself as the future of electronic entertainment is that the future isn't necessarily always the best place to be, especially in the seasonal world of videogames, hence the current retro mania. Perhaps this is why **Edge** has chosen to include the GBA? Personally I hope it's more of a gameplay over graphics move, which is a nice change in an increasingly 'graphics' and 'hardware' tart industry.

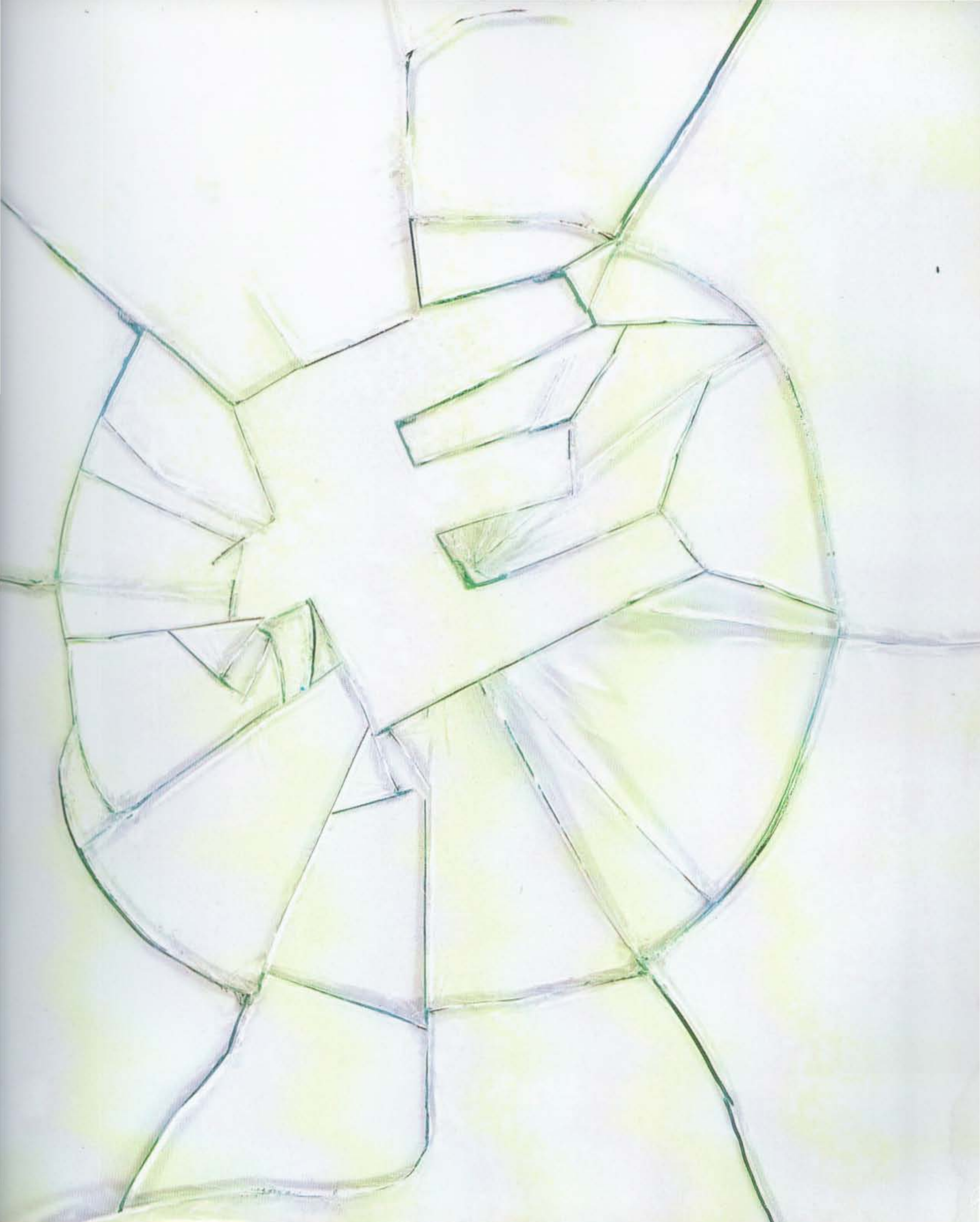
Topic: **Scores question in E101**
Poster: **Dave Ver 2**

There is no doubt in my mind – the scores should go. I read **Edge** to find out about the games coming out but, no matter how bad the review, I trust my instincts first and foremost. I love *The Bouncer* – everyone slated it. *PSO* no fun as an offline game? Not to me. I will never buy a *Gran Turismo* game, so don't talk to me about *GT3*'s ultra-realistic textures – I'm just not interested. In short, make the reviews larger and give me as much info as possible, but leave me to draw my own conclusions. I always have.

Next month



Nintendo's dream machine:
the **Edge** verdict



Gun Metal (Xbox)



page 032

Doom (GBA)



page 037

Bomberman Generation (GameCube)



page 036

Dave Mirra Freeestyle BMX 2 (PS2)



page 080

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